



IMMEDIATE CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE RESTAURANT SECTOR

by

JANETH MINERVA ALVARADO SILVA

A dissertation presented to the

FACULTY OF LAW

INDEPENDENT COLLEGE DUBLIN

MA in Dispute Resolution

May 2020

Dublin, Ireland

Student Number:

51679680

Student Name:

Janeth Minerva Alvarado Silva

Course:

MA in Dispute Resolution

Dissertation Topic:

Immediate Conflict Resolution in the Restaurant Sector

Supervisor:

Beatrice Vance

Due Date:

22/05/2020

Word Count:

15119

I certify that:

- This dissertation is all my own work, and no part of this dissertation has been copied from another source: Yes ☒ No ☐
- I consent to having my dissertation be retained in the library for the purpose of future research. Yes ☒ No ☐

[Note that if no check boxes are selected, this dissertation will be regarded as NOT properly submitted, and may be subject to a late submission penalty]

Signature: _____

Date: 22/05/2020

Declaration

I hereby affirm that:

- This Master's dissertation represents my own written work except where stated otherwise by reference.
- All sources have been reported and acknowledged.
- This dissertation has not been submitted entirely or in parts for any degree or other qualification.

Signed: Janeth Minerva Alvarado Silva

Date: 22nd of May 2020

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Declaration | 1 |
| Acknowledgements | 5 |
| Abstract | 6 |
| List of Figures | 7 |
| Introduction | 9 |
| <i>The statement of the problem</i> | 9 |
| <i>Research Aims</i> | 9 |
| <i>Dissertation roadmap</i> | 10 |
| <i>Scope and limitations</i> | 10 |
| <i>Significance of the study</i> | 11 |
| Chapter 1 — Literature review | 13 |
| <i>Hospitality industry</i> | 13 |
| <i>Customer</i> | 14 |
| <i>Conflict management</i> | 14 |
| <i>Customer service and satisfaction</i> | 15 |
| <i>Customer complaints and service recovery strategies</i> | 18 |
| <i>Restaurant sector in Ireland</i> | 21 |
| <i>Customer service in Ireland</i> | 22 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Chapter 2 – Research methodology | 23 |
| <i>Research philosophy and approaches</i> | 23 |
| <i>Research design</i> | 23 |
| Interviews | 24 |
| Questionnaire | 24 |
| Survey | 25 |
| <i>Time horizon</i> | 26 |
| <i>Ethical considerations</i> | 26 |
| <i>Data Collection and Analysis</i> | 27 |
| Chapter 3 – Presentation of the data | 28 |
| <i>Questionnaire data</i> | 28 |
| <i>Survey data</i> | 37 |
| <i>Interviews data</i> | 49 |
| Assistant Manager Interview | 50 |
| General Manager Interview | 51 |
| Chapter 4 - Data Analysis and Findings | 54 |
| <i>Questionnaire and interviews analysis</i> | 54 |
| <i>Survey Analysis</i> | 58 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> | 60 |
| Chapter 5 – Discussion | 61 |
| Conclusion | 65 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| <i>Further research</i> | 67 |
| Reflection | 69 |
| Bibliography | 71 |
| Appendix A: Interview questions | 75 |
| Appendix B: Questionnaire questions | 76 |
| Appendix C: Survey questions | 80 |
| Appendix D: Ethical considerations in the questionnaire | 85 |
| Appendix E: Ethical considerations in the survey | 85 |
| Appendix F: Information sheet for participants | 86 |
| Appendix G: Interview transcripts: Assistant Manager | 87 |
| Appendix H: Interview transcript General Manager | 99 |
| Appendix I: Questionnaire open questions responses | 106 |
| Appendix J: Survey open questions responses | 108 |

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by thanking all the participants who shared a bit of their personal experience for the benefit of this study. My sincere gratitude goes out to all the teachers who shared their valuable knowledge as well as to my supervisor Beatrice Vance for her valuable guidance and advice. A special thanks to my flatmates for their appreciated support and delicious dinners. I wish to show my gratitude to my workmates who supported me with their words of encouragement, their time and their patience. You are like a family to me. I also want to thank my brother Luis and my dearest friends for believing in me and being present every time I needed them, especially my classmates and friends Daniela and Karen. I would like to recognize the invaluable backing that you all provided during my study. I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my friend Karina for understanding, encouraging and supporting me, for always being on the other end of the phone every time I wanted to give up. Last but not least, I want to thank my beloved parents for being the main promoters of my dreams who always told me that nothing is impossible to achieve. I dedicate this dissertation to both of you.

Immediate Conflict Resolution in the Restaurant Sector

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on conflict resolution between customers and restaurants when customers have a bad experience when visiting a restaurant. This study identifies the strategies used by a restaurant in resolving and dealing with customer complaints and determines how their staff handle complaints and whether the appropriate training has been provided for staff to adequately deal with customer complaints. Moreover, the current research analyses the customer's perspective on suboptimal service in restaurants, analyses the main problems customers face when they visit a restaurant and evaluates the importance that customers place on service and food quality. In addition, this research discovers how customers register their complaints in restaurants after a bad experience. This dissertation offers an in-depth discussion about the importance of customer recovery after a service failure and before the conflict escalates, and determines the main factors that would cause customers to return to the same restaurant.

The mixed methods approach used in the research design of this dissertation comprises qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. These techniques or strategies, as they are also referred to in the current research, comprise questionnaires that were distributed among customer-facing staff, interviews with general and assistant managers of a restaurant and a survey among members of the Irish general public.

List of Figures

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 1 Questionnaire: Gender | 28 |
| Figure 2 Questionnaire: Age | 29 |
| Figure 3 questionnaire: Experience | 30 |
| Figure 4 Questionnaire: Source of income | 31 |
| Figure 5 Questionnaire: Dependents | 31 |
| Figure 6 Questionnaire: Depend on this job | 31 |
| Figure 7 Questionnaire: Working for years to come | 32 |
| Figure 8 Questionnaire: Improving skills | 32 |
| Figure 9 Questionnaire: Reports to managers | 33 |
| Figure 10 Questionnaire: Customer complaints | 34 |
| Figure 11 Questionnaire: Complaint actions | 35 |
| Figure 12 Questionnaire: Training | 35 |
| Figure 13 Questionnaire: Restaurant training | 36 |
| Figure 14 Questionnaire: Official procedures | 36 |
| Figure 15 Survey: Gender | 37 |
| Figure 16 Survey: Age | 38 |
| Figure 17 Survey: Frequency | 38 |
| Figure 18 Survey: People is likely to eat out for: | 39 |
| Figure 19 Survey: Important aspects | 40 |
| Figure 20 Survey: Recommendation based on service | 40 |
| Figure 21 Survey: Customers returning due to good food | 41 |
| Figure 22 Survey: Returning motives | 42 |
| Figure 23 Survey: Customer bad experiences | 43 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Figure 24 Survey: Problems reported to the team | 44 |
| Figure 25 Survey: Staff compensation actions | 44 |
| Figure 26 Survey: How restaurants compensate | 45 |
| Figure 27 Survey: Recovery | 46 |
| Figure 28 Survey: Complaints procedures | 47 |
| Figure 29 Survey: Complaints on social media | 48 |
| Figure 30 Survey: Suggested Solutions | 48 |
| Figure 31 Survey: Complaints to get something free of charge | 49 |
| Figure 32 Findings | 55 |
| Figure 33 Findings | 56 |
| Figure 34 Findings | 57 |

Introduction

The statement of the problem

When receiving the wrong order, having to wait too long to be served or having been mistreated by staff, customers in a restaurant in some cases make a complaint. It is at that moment when a conflict between the restaurant and the customer occurs that can result in a bad customer experience. Such an experience may prevent customers from returning to the same restaurant. Such a customer complaint is a conflict that the restaurant must resolve in a timely manner when it arises in order to recover the customer before the conflict escalates. Conflict can increase through bad feedback on social media or can cause loss of customers and revenue. Complaints and bad feedback can impact sales, the attraction and retention of new customers, while bad customer experiences can lead to the loss of regular customers.

Research Aims

This dissertation identifies the strategies used by a restaurant in resolving and dealing with customer complaints. The current research discusses whether the restaurant has a protocol in place to process and record customer complaints and identifies whether customer-facing staff can handle customer complaints. Within this context, staff training will be discussed as well as how staff themselves think customer complaints mainly come into being.

The current research explores the key factors in the process of customers choosing a restaurant, and evaluates the importance of good service. In addition, the current research identifies the main problems customers face when visiting a restaurant. In order to determine the most effective methods for recovery from a bad experience this research provides an insight into how social media and other

methods are used to register complaints from the part of the customer as well as deal with complaints from the part of the restaurant.

Dissertation roadmap

Chapter 1 examines current literature by key authors who have contributed to the areas relevant to this research, such as the hospitality industry, customer service and conflict resolution. Chapter 2 discusses the applicable research methodology, which comprises a mixed-methods approach of quantitative and qualitative research. The current research comprises three strategies: interviews with two managers, questionnaires submitted to 14 members of the staff and a survey among a sample of 101 respondents in the Irish population. The data is presented in Chapter 3 the responses obtained by means of the strategies mentioned above are detailed through charts and tables. Chapter 4 analyses the previously-mentioned data. Chapter 5 discusses the findings obtained from the interviews, the questionnaire and the survey as well as the information obtained from the literature. Chapter 5 goes on to present the implications, ideas and clarifications of this research.

Scope and limitations

This investigation was conducted in Dublin Ireland, and research data was collected over the course of one month. The current research comprises three strategies: a survey among a sample of 101 respondents in the Irish population, a questionnaires submitted to 14 members of the staff, and interviews with two managers. The questionnaire and interviews were conducted with 11 waiters and 3 supports who have direct contact with customer and with the general manager and the assistant manager of a commercially successful restaurant, which achieves approximately 2,000 covers per week. This research discusses the strategies used by the restaurant and its staff to deal with customer complaints and analyse the key aspects in choosing a restaurant from a customer perspective. in

addition, discuss customer behaviour following negative customer experiences as well as the relevant recovery strategies deployed by restaurants.

The current research is subject to limitations. Although every care has been taken to ensure that the research questions have been clearly formulated, different respondents may have interpreted given questions differently, based on their own experience or understanding. Furthermore, respondents may not tell the truth or be completely honest with their answers. Some people may not respond honestly due to prejudice or shame. Another significant limitation is that the research was conducted in one restaurant only. If the sample were amplified, conclusions could be made generally rather than in terms of the restaurant that is the exclusive focus of the current research.

Significance of the study

In a competitive and growing hospitality market, good service and effective customer conflict resolution can be a decisive factor in gaining and retaining competitive edge. Even if a restaurant sells quality food, Restaurants can lose customers due to bad customer experiences. This can quickly escalate and result in bad publicity. However, if restaurants know how to resolve customer conflicts such escalations need not occur. The current research discusses and provides solutions to conflicts between a restaurants and its customers by enabling restaurants to understand and anticipate what customers expect from them when a customer registers a complaint. This dissertation determines the key factors when dealing with customer complaints, while identifying and cataloguing the main complaints made by customers to help restaurants win back lost business after a bad customer experience. In addition, the current research analyses the behaviour of waiters and support staff, who are likely to be the main and first point of contact regarding customer complaints and investigates whether restaurant staff are trained effectively to solve conflicts in a timely and satisfactory manner.

The recommendations provided in the current research aim to increase business share and sales by ensuring repeat business as well as improving customer feedback on social media with a view to developing business growth and business reputation. This research could further help the reader to understand the importance of conflict resolution in the hospitality sector and can be a starting point for future research.

Chapter 1 — Literature review

Hospitality industry

Walker (2017, p. 36) states that “The concept of hospitality is as old as civilization itself”. Also affirms that hospitality comes from hospice, a French word to provide care/shelter for travellers (Walker, 2017). Crick & Spencer (2015, p. 22) argues that “Hospitality is one of the world’s oldest professions, and it continues to be shaped by its history”.

The hospitality industry can be divided into three sections: food service, accommodation and recreational activities. The food service industry category includes full-service restaurants that offer a vast menu, food prepared after ordering and a special atmosphere (Allen & Albala, 2007, p. 226). In *Irish Foodservice Market & Consumer Insights*, Bord Bia (2019, pp. 39-43) define the commercial channels as limited-service restaurants as restaurants that provide quick service, fast casual and food-on-the-go. Full-service restaurants generally offer menus with a wide range of items, mostly focusing lunch or dinner, including casual dining and white tablecloth service.

Introduction to Food Production and Service (Egan, s.f.) discusses that food services in the United States is a dominant segment of the hospitality industry and significant in the economy. The restaurant sector in the United States amounts to approximately USD 800 billion and food services are a significant sector of employment with 10% of the US workforce employed in restaurants. TripAdvisor (2019) also say that the global restaurant industry represents USD 1.6 trillion in opportunity with an expected market growth of 4.7% per year through 2022. Full-service restaurants represented 51% of sales in 2018 in the foodservice industry. TripAdvisor and TheFork, a company owned by TripAdvisor, reports that they influenced almost USD 8 billion in global diner spending, representing more than 320 million additional meals in restaurants (TripAdvisor, 2019).

Customer

Solomon (2018, pp. 28-29) defines that a consumer is a person who recognizes a necessity or desire and makes a purchase. Consumer behaviour is the study of the processes involved when customers, purchase, use or dispose of products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy needs and desires. However, Barlow and Møller (2008, p. 10) expand this definition by adding that “customer” means not just the paying customer but anyone who benefits from goods and services.

In *Happy About Customer Service?* Welsh (2008, p. 48) suggests that the restaurant industry depend on their customers and not the other way around. Customers constitute the purpose of the hospitality sector and should not be seen as an interruption or inconvenience. Welsh also says that customers are giving the hospitality sector the opportunity to serve them. The hospitality sector is not just doing the customer a favour by serving them.

Conflict management

Conflict management is the communication that a person uses based on their own analysis of the conflict. The resolution refers to an alternative to resolving the conflict and to prevent recurrence of the conflict. In this strategy, management involve alternatives to resolve conflict or to avoid it completely. However, effective conflict management occurs when communication produces mutual understanding and a favourable outcome for those involved in the conflict (Cahn & Abigail, 2014, p. 7).

Not all conflicts can be resolved but learning to manage them can reduce the impact of conflict. In the workplace where conflict is inevitable, it should be easily handled, a discovered conflict can be stopped before it grows. When it is detected a strategy can be applied quickly and actions are taken. Proper communication is essential for conflict resolution (Kayden, et al., 2015, p. 16). Cahn and

Abigail (2014, p. 230) identify that conflict becomes a dispute when a communication barrier exists between those involved. This can obstruct a normal relationship.

Customer service and satisfaction

For customers, employee performance constitutes the service. The customer's perception of the quality of service comprises two elements: the satisfaction with which service was provided and the way in which it was delivered. As far as the customer-facing employee is concerned, hospitality is a significant factor in customer satisfaction (Crick & Spencer, 2015, pp. 27-28).

Andrew Greasley (2013) states that:

Tangibility is the most commonly used distinction between goods and services. Goods are tangible, they are physical things that you can touch. A service is intangible and can be seen as a process that is activated on demand. In reality, both goods and services have both tangible and intangible elements and can be placed on a continuum ranging from low to high intangibility. E.g., the food in a fast-food restaurant is a major tangible element of the service. The food in a restaurant is still an important element, but other intangible element such as waiter service and decor are important factors too (2013, p. 12).

Quality is a challenge for organisations that offer service. Tangible and intangible aspects such as food and service at a restaurant have to meet quality standards to generate and sustain custom. The quality of intangible services can be unpredictable and difficult to measure. Quality will depend on the judgment of customers, so we have to look at what customers use to judge quality (Greasley, 2013, p. 398). According to Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1991, cited in Crick & Spencer, 2015, p. 26) the experience of quality service is driven by the individual opinions of each customer and each employee. These are based on the expectations that arise based on the individuality of each.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985, cited in Crick & Spencer, 2015) list five principal dimensions customers use to judge service quality:

- Reliability

Customers expect a reliable service, delivered on time, in the same way every time and without errors.

- Responsiveness

Customers do not like to wait, especially without reason. Responsiveness is related to the willingness to help customers and provide fast service. For the customer to have a good experience, fast customer recovery when a service failure occurs is important.

- Assurance

Related to the employees who provide customer service, employees must communicate effectively with the customer as one of their competencies in addition to showing respect for the customer.

- Empathy

Employees should provide attentive and individualized service with sensitivity to the needs of the customer.

- Tangibles

in relation to the physical environment of service presentation, a clean and orderly physical environment gives the customer the impression of attention to detail (Greasley, 2013, pp. 400-401).

Employees who meet customer expectations are those who are friendly, professional, can solve problems effectively and are able to understand customer needs (Torres & Kline, 2015, p. 171). Greasley (2013) states that effectiveness is the extent to which a process meets customer requirements. The effectiveness of service can be measured through customer satisfaction surveys.

However, effectiveness depends on the perceptions and expectations of individual customers, making it more difficult to measure the effectiveness of service than productivity or efficiency.

Walker have been a recognized customer experience consulting firm since 1939. In *their Customers 2020: A Progress Report*, Walker (2020) argue that customer experience has a more effective competitive advantage than cost reduction.

A study carried out in the United States by American Express based on a sample of 1,000 respondents showed that 33% consider changing companies immediately after a bad service, 60% after two or three bad service experiences and 69% said they would spend more with a company that has good customer service. Nine out of ten respondents tell others about their service experience. The same study shows that social networks are increasingly seen as the preferred channel to engage with customer services. On social media 35% post negative comments and 53% positive comments. In other words, respondents are more likely to provide positive feedback than bad feedback on social media (American Express Customer Service Barometer, 2017). Market research conducted with 10,000 US consumers showed how customer recommendation is related to customer experience across 20 industries. Seventy-seven percent of consumers would recommend a company after having a positive experience and 86% are likely to repurchase (Temkin, 2017)

The Michelin guide says that customer service must be absolutely necessary in the company regardless of the type of restaurant it is, since good service is universal (MICHELIN Guide UK Editorial Team, 2020). *The worlds 50 best restaurants* is a list produced by UK media company William Reed Business Media wherein an international ceremony, each year are awarded the best restaurants in the world and have as one of its individual categories the Art of Hospitality Award (The worlds 50 best restaurants, s.f.).

Customer complaints and service recovery strategies

“The fine Art of Complaining” (Judkis, 2015) suggests that many clients do not like to complain. Complaining is uncomfortable, especially if the customer is enjoying a special occasion. Customers may not come back to the restaurant without giving a reason. Managers can learn more by checking at each table before problems occur or escalate. The article also suggests that a good restaurant should accept constructive criticism from its customers as an opportunity for improvement and to have the opportunity to correct the bad experience before the customer posts a negative review on social media.

Barlow & Møller (2008) have identified that:

The single most critical reason why customers complain is that they believe something will happen as a result of their complaints. It's useful to separate the dissatisfaction customers experience from the decisions they make to actually complain. Customers can be extremely dissatisfied and not say anything, or they can feel only minor dissatisfaction and speak up if they believe the company will do something for them (pp. 62-63).

Barlow & Møller (2008, p. 17) state that when customers are not satisfied with the services or products they can say it or they can leave without saying it. If they leave they do not give the organization any opportunity to amend their dissatisfaction. Customers who complain are communicating with the service or product provider giving them the opportunity to win them back so they are more likely to become repeat customers. Also, Barlow & Møller (2008, p. 99) Strongly believe that, people are more likely to complain if the problem generates a budgetary loss. If costumers face problems with service, they are less likely to say so, compared to having a problem with a product. customers do not like complaining about people's behaviours.

Barlow & Møller (2008) Also believe:

If costumers walk away angry with “expressed complaints that do not get handled”, there may not be much a company can do to stop their negative word of mouth. But if companies make it easy for

customers to complain and then handle these complaints well, dissatisfaction levels will decrease, negative word of mouth will lessen, and positive word of mouth may be generated (p. 50).

A restaurant should offer something free of charge depending on the situation, from an appetizer, a drink or removing the item from the account, even if the team are aware that a customer is complaining only to get something free or to not pay the bill, the customer is always right and the staff has to try to keep customers happy. A good customer recovery can convert a customer one-star review into five stars (Judkis, 2015). Barlow & Møller (2008, p. 43) States that “If costumers feel their problem have been satisfactorily resolved, almost all will give the company another chance”.

Since problems are not unusual, but it all depends on how they are handled, trained staff can turn a bad experience into a good one. A good restaurant relies on its staff to handle any situation (Michelin Guide, 2020). Welsh (2008, p. 48) also says that we should not argue with a customer since nobody wins an argument with a customer. Customers tell the staff what they want, and is the job of the staff to do their requirements in a profitable way for both the customer and the restaurant.

Large companies have implemented sophisticated technologies to respond more efficiently to complaints, and many individuals and companies have learned to handle them better. Many companies have educated their staff to better respond to dissatisfied customers (Barlow & Møller, 2008, p. 3).

Barlow & Møller (2008) strongly believe that:

Communicating with complaining customers is when maximum contact takes place, the most information from customers is gathered, and the greatest opportunity for service recovery and continuous improvement exists. If the company can fix the problem, take responsibility for the breakdown, and be polite and friendly, customers are more likely to give the company another chance (p. 59).

Dutta, et al. (2007) conclude in their investigation that a compensation offered to the customer after a failure in service works much better than apologizing since it reflects commitment and interest. They also argue that it is necessary to have faster and simple processes for compensating customers and that staff should be empowered to deal with customer complaints with confidence. Johnston and Fern (1999, cited in Torres & Kline, 2015, p. 168) say that failing to meet customer expectations, is an opportunity that must be taken to please the customer and turn complaints into favorable experiences since he ensures that customers who have had a corrected problem may be more committed than those they have not had any problems.

Barlow & Møller (2008) states that:

Complaints can work for or against your company in the following ways:

- People are much more likely to believe a personal recommendation than an advertiser's promotional statements.
- Effective complaint handling can be a powerful source of positive word of mouth.
- The more dissatisfied customers become, the more likely they are to use word of mouth to express their displeasure (p. 47).

The social psychology principle of reciprocity explains why customers are likely to say positive comments after a restaurant has fixed a problem, people are likely to be reciprocated when they get something pleasing (Barlow & Møller, 2008, p. 105).

According to Solomon (2018):

Informal discussions among consumers can make or break a product or store. Furthermore, consumers weigh negative word-of-mouth more heavily than they do positive comments. Especially when we consider a new product or service, we're likely to pay more attention to negative information than to positive information and to tell others about our nasty experience (p. 425).

Barlow & Møller (2008, p. 48) also states that “Negative word of mouth can even affect an entire industry dramatically”. Pleased, customers, are likely to give positive recommendations to others. Customer retention and competitive advantage are linked with pleased customers. (Crick & Spencer, 2015).

Barlow & Møller (2008, p. 186) reported that in a research carried out in 2003 about satisfaction and intention to repurchase in the hospitality industry were directly related to how timely restaurants responded to complaints emails. According to Jung-Eun Yoo, et al. (Jung-Eun Yoo, et al., 2012) is important to collect feedback of customers since the conflicts that the customers may have are an opportunity for the service provider, in this case the restaurant, to improve the service and encourage the client to let them know when something is not going right.

Restaurant sector in Ireland

The restaurant sector in Ireland contributes EUR 2 billion to the Irish economy each year with more than 3,500 restaurants in Ireland. The restaurant sector employs 72,000 people and is creating more jobs and opportunities than ever (Restaurants Association of Ireland, s.f.).

In 2018, in the Irish hospitality sector, the market for restaurants represented a value of EUR 1.98 billion with a growth of 5.1%. Seventy-seven percent of this market was domestic, 13% came from the United Kingdom, 5% from North America, 3% from Europe and 2% from the rest of the world (Hospitality and Tourism Outlook, 2019).

Irish Foodservice Market Insights Report (Bord Bia Irish Food Board, 2019, pp. 14-16) shows that Irish consumers expended EUR 8.55 billion on out-of-home food and beverage in 2019 of which 12% was in full-service restaurants, with an expected growth in the Republic of Ireland of 4.5% between 2019 and 2023.

Customer service in Ireland

The Restaurants Association of Ireland (RAI) has had training programs such as Senior Executive Training in 2017 in which one of the core topics was customer service (Restaurants Association, 2017). The Restaurant & Hospitality Skillnet (s.f.) was created by the RAI to provide courses for the restaurant and hospitality industry such as customer service.

The Restaurants Association of Ireland organise and promote the annual Irish Restaurant Awards, Ireland's premier restaurant event. The Irish Restaurant Awards is an event that has been held annually for twelve years now to showcase the talent of the hospitality industry in Ireland and the general public nominates their favourite restaurants for each of the categories. One of the main categories of the Irish Restaurant Awards is *Best Customer Service*, where the winning restaurant is expected to have friendly and attentive staff that go further and have been trained in the art of great customer service where the staff is professional and represents the culture of the restaurant (Irish Restaurant Awards, s.f.).

Bord Bia's *Irish Foodservice Market Insights Report* found that customer service is a differentiator and that perceiving goodwill by operators is a customer need (Bord Bia Irish Food Board, 2019, p. 19). The desires of consumers to visit places where they feel good and where that feeling may be due to good hospitality and respect that goes beyond. A pleasant sensation of human quality service provides an extra value to the food. Foodservice operators should take advantage of the opportunity to add extra value through service and take it further to develop brand loyalty among customers (Drinks Industry Ireland, 2019).

Chapter 2 – Research methodology

This chapter introduces the research methodology and discusses methods for the development of the current research, based on *Research Methods for Business Students* (Saunders, et al., 2007).

Research philosophy and approaches

The research philosophy of this project is positivism based on the base knowledge of objective reality, which is obtained through observation of staff who work in the restaurant and deal with complaints made by customers. The fact that customers had complaints is consistent with the notion of “observable social reality” (Saunders, et al., 2007, p. 131).

Deductive and inductive approaches have been applied to this research, since one theory is being tested and another developed. The deductive approach, from the general to the particular, builds on the current knowledge taken from the data collected in the literature review, helping to identify theories and ideas that will be tested using data. The inductive approach discovers through the used strategies our own hypotheses since the research has a definite purpose with which can be achieved new findings (Saunders, et al., 2007, p. 57).

Research design

This investigation was conducted during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) health crisis. Since 6 March 2020 the restaurant, which is the focus of the current research, saw a considerable drop in the number of customers. On 20 March 2020 the restaurant closed its doors for the duration of national health emergency restrictions imposed by the government, during which physical distancing rules applied and members of the public were not allowed to travel beyond a two-kilometre radius from their home, while being urged to stay at home as much as possible to prevent the spread of COVID-

19 (The Irish Times, 2020). Therefore, modifications of as well as updates and adaptations to the original research design were made. An experiment was carried out in the restaurant since the beginning of March 2020, until the restaurant closed, which includes graphs and statistics from the restaurant. However, given the COVID-19 restrictions this experiment could not be completed.

In the current research design a mixed methods approach is used, in which both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques are implemented (Saunders, et al., 2007, p. 602).

The implemented strategies comprise three stages, interviews and a questionnaire and a survey.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the general manager and the assistant manager of a commercially successful restaurant, which achieves approximately 2,000 covers per week. Since, due to the COVID-19 physical distancing rules no face-to-face interviews could be conducted, the interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis by way of video calls, based on a list of specific and closed questions. The interviews lasted approximately 15 minutes each and were recorded using the audio recorder tool on a mobile phone. Respondents were asked for and provided their consent to record the interviews.

Both managers were asked the same key questions aimed at understanding the impact of bad feedback, showing the main concerns or complaints registered by customers and how complaints are currently handled. The output of this part of the research was analysed qualitatively in order to inform the objectives of this research. The interview questions are listed in Appendix A.

Questionnaire

Eleven waiters and three support staff who are employees of the same restaurant as the managers interviewed and are in direct contact with customers completed questionnaires to determine how

customer complaints are handled and how staff behave in different situations. The questionnaires completed by the respondents were self-administered on Google Forms between 9 and 16 April 2020. The format of the questions was threefold: multiple-choice, closed-ended and open-ended. It is considered that the risk of contamination of answers is very low, as the respondents are not close to each other to discuss answers or for the researcher presence to influence in any way their answers. Respondents were available to complete the questionnaires because of the COVID-19 stay-at-home restrictions.

To facilitate the exchange and processing of the questionnaires, Google Forms was chosen because of its automated functionality and ease of use. The questions were formulated on the strength of three variables, namely, opinion, behaviour and attribute. Open question, list question and category questions were implemented (Saunders, et al., 2007, pp. 354-394). The questionnaire questions are listed in Appendix B.

Survey

The survey strategy is ideal for collecting a large amount of data from a general population as it allows the collection of quantitative data. As with the questionnaires, Google Forms was used to create and share the survey. Responses are collected in an online spreadsheet, which are easy to create and allow the invitation of respondents by email, WhatsApp or any other social media. Respondents could use any internet-enabled device to complete the survey.

The survey was carried out between 8 April and 5 May 2020, resulting in 101 responses. The survey was written in clear and simple language to ensure that the audience could understand it easily and to avoid ambiguity. The format of the questions was multiple-choice, closed-ended and open-ended. Only Irish nationals living in Ireland were asked to answer the survey. Firstly, because this research work was carried out in Ireland. Secondly, to prevent that non-Irish nationals base their answers on

previous experiences in restaurants in their own country where customer service could be different due to language, culture, habits and traditions that might influence the answers of the respondents (Saunders, et al., 2007, p. 138). The survey questions are listed in Appendix C.

Time horizon

The cross-sectional approach is optimal for this study in the interest of analysing data from a specific point in time where the researcher do not interfere with the respondents. The current research is an analytic study, allowing the comparison of many different variables at the same time. Interviews, questionnaires and surveys were conducted only once to the respondents. The study environment was not manipulated. No one has been asked to modify their behaviour.

Ethical considerations

In order for the information to be valid, it is necessary to have ethical considerations for the collection of data to avoid any harm to respondents. Therefore, this research is carefully aware of ethical issues that may be implied. The general population and the restaurant employees were informed of their participation and gave their consent (Saunders, et al., 2007, p. 153).

The confidentiality and anonymity of each person who participates in this research project are maintained. Interviewees and respondents were informed that all the data collected is used to complete the current research. No person was forced to participate in the research and participation was completely voluntary. No payment was made to any respondent. Respondents were made aware of the time required for completion of the interview, survey and questionnaire.

Ethical considerations for the questionnaire and survey can be found in appendices D and E. The information sheet for the respondents in the interviews can be found in Appendix F. The informed

consent forms signed by the assistant manager and general manager of the restaurant were submitted in a separate document to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

In the current research, the data obtained from the surveys and the questionnaire were interpreted and displayed in the form of pie charts and bar charts using Google Forms tools for presentation and data analysis.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim to provide a clear and accurate transcript that captures the meaning, perception and context of the interviews (MOS, 2017). After the data obtained was conceptualized, the information was segmented and prioritized. Thereafter, the information was displayed in descriptive and narrative format for the benefit of analysis . (Kumar, 2011, p. 282). Interview transcripts with the assistant manager and general manager of the restaurant can be found in appendices G and H.

Chapter 3 – Presentation of the data

This chapter presents the data obtained from the questionnaires completed by the restaurant waiters and support staff, the interviews with the restaurant managers, and the survey.

Questionnaire data

The objective of using the questionnaire was to determine how the waiters and customer-facing support staff dealt with customer complaints and to assess whether staff were prepared to deal with those complaints. The questionnaire also aimed to observe whether variables such as age, gender, experience or economic dependence influenced their performance when dealing with complaints. Additionally, the questionnaire sought to determine whether staff had a genuine interest in improving their skills to deal with customer complaints and whether they wanted to continue working for the restaurant.

The following figure show the basic demographic data of the respondents in the current research.

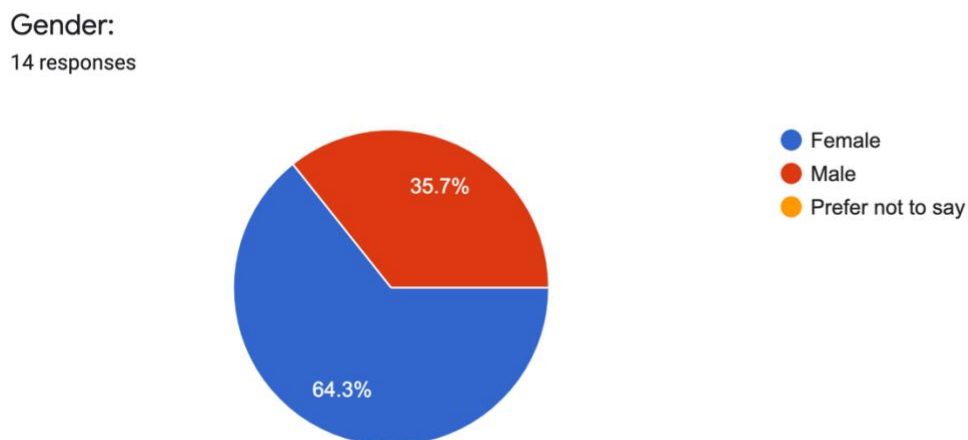


Figure 1 Questionnaire: Gender

Of 14 respondents, five were male and nine were female. One respondent was between 30 to 35, two respondents between 25 and 29, two respondents over 36 and nine between 18 and 24 years old (see figures 1 and 2).

Age:

14 responses

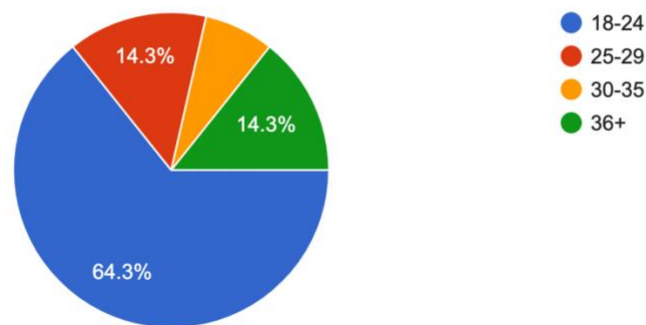


Figure 2 Questionnaire: Age

Seven respondents (50%) had one to two years' experience in working in hospitality. Three respondents had between three to five years' experience. One person had less than one year of experience and three respondents over nine years' experience (see Figure 3). It is worth mentioning that the question refers to working in the sector in general and not only in the current restaurant. Having experience positively influences performance in the field in which it is developed (Tom E. Jones, 2019). The question whether the respondents had experience in hospitality, therefore, was fundamental in the current research.

How many years of experience working in hospitality do you have?

14 responses

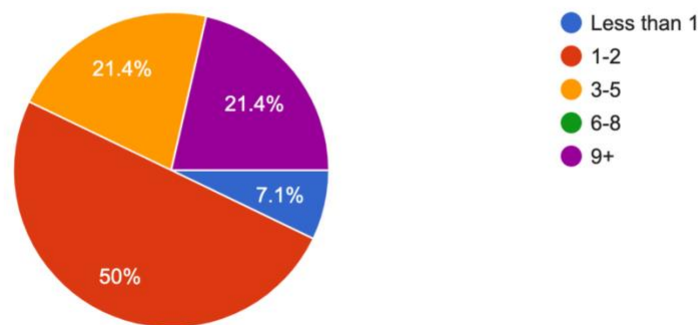


Figure 3 questionnaire: Experience

Whether this job was the main source of income of waiters and support staff or whether they had dependents, as well as whether they depended on working in the restaurant to subsist, is important data that can broaden the perspective and help to determine whether these factors influence staff performance or interest in the job and whether these factors relate to the service provided to customers.

As can be seen in figures 4, 5 and 6, eleven of 14 respondents said that the job in the restaurant was their only source of income. Four respondents could live without the income from working in the restaurant, but preferred to have the income. For ten respondents their job in the restaurant was their main source of income. None of the respondents had dependents.

Is this job your only source of income?
14 responses

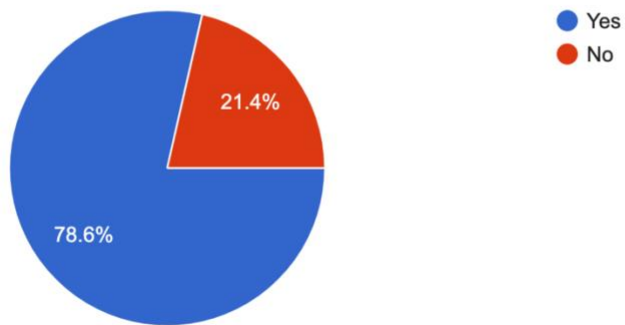


Figure 4 Questionnaire: Source of income

Do you have any dependents?
14 responses

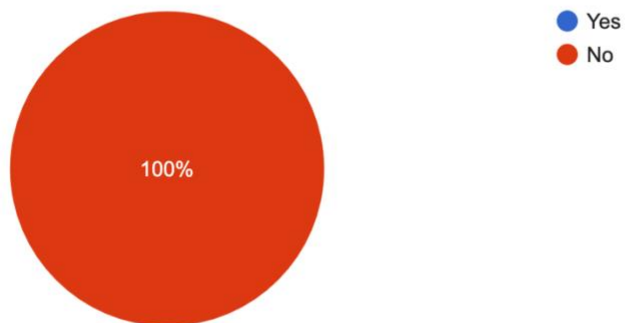


Figure 5 Questionnaire: Dependents

Do you depend on this job as your main source of income?
14 responses



Figure 6 Questionnaire: Depend on this job

The next two questions intended to show a possible correlation between employees who are not intending on working in the restaurant for a long time and want to improve their performance.

Eight (57%) respondents answered that they do not see themselves working in the restaurant for years to come. Three respondents believe that they will be working in the restaurant in the future. Three respondents said that they may be working in the restaurant (see Figure 7).

Do you see yourself working in the restaurant for years to come?
14 responses

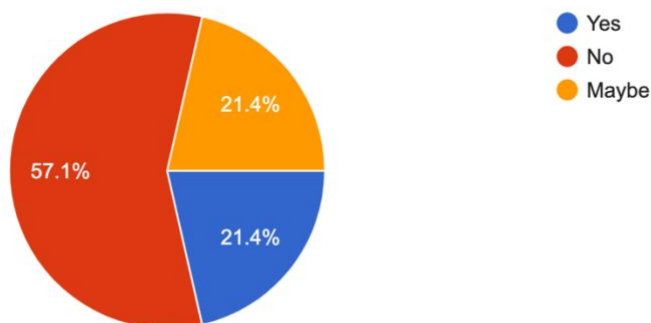


Figure 7 Questionnaire: Working for years to come

The majority of the respondents (79%) answered they have a true interest in improving their skills as a waiter or waitress. Three respondents said they do not have an interest (see Figure 8).

Do you have a true interest in improving your skills as a waiter or waitress?
14 responses

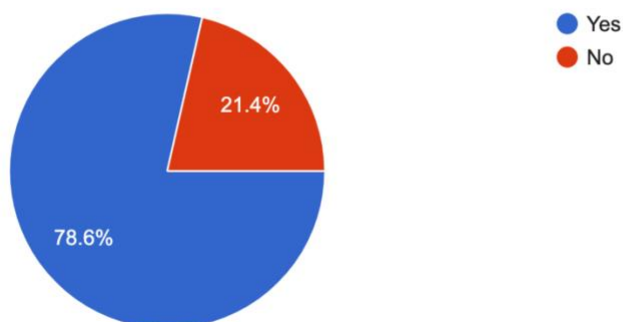


Figure 8 Questionnaire: Improving skills

The following open-ended question was asked to the participants to determine the first step that respondents take when facing a situation of a conflict with a customer.

When you have a problem with a customer what is the first thing you do?

Three participants would apologize, two respondents said they would call the manager for help, two respondents would first see whether they could solve the problem themselves before calling the manager, two respondents said they would try to think of the best solution. The remainder said that getting to the core of the problem, listening, being nice or staying calm would be the first thing they would do. Verbatim transcriptions of responses are listed in Appendix I.

To determine whether managers were aware and up to date regarding all the complaints that were presented or whether they were aware of only some complaints, waiters and support staff were asked whether they report all complaints with managers. Two respondents sometimes report customer complaints to their manager, three respondents report complaints to their manager if the customer requests it and nine respondents always report complaints (see Figure 9).

When a client complains do you report it with a manager?

14 responses

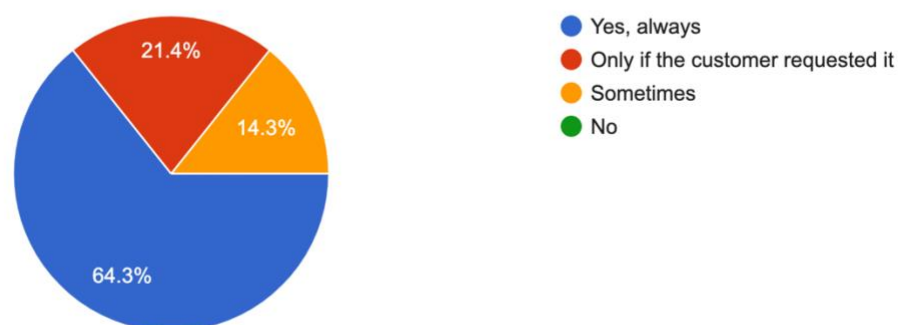


Figure 9 Questionnaire: Reports to managers

A further question was asked to gain further insight into what waiters and support staff see as the source of complaints based on their experiences. One respondent said that customer complaints are mostly related to the speed of food delivery, three respondents mentioned service-related problems, nine respondents referred to kitchen problems and two respondents reported to a mix of mentioned factors. None of the respondents considered that customer complaints were mostly related to incorrect orders taken by waiters (see Figure 10).

Based on your experience, customer complaints are mainly related to:

14 responses

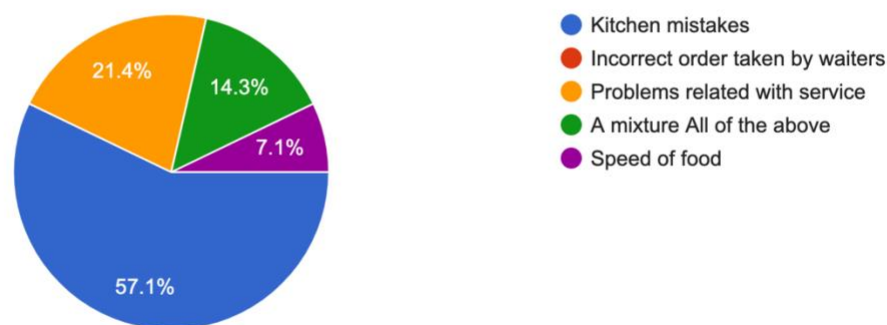


Figure 10 Questionnaire: Customer complaints

In order to measure the importance placed on a customer complaint, respondents were given a series of options to determine which one they identified with the most. Nine respondents selected the option: I care so much, and I try to do the best possible for the customer to be satisfied and compensated. Four respondents chose: I make an effort, but it does not interest me much. One respondent chose: I care, and it does matter to me, but it depends on the situation (see Figure 11).

When a customer has a complaint:

14 responses



Figure 11 Questionnaire: Complaint actions

As a trained employee is able to perform better (Business Insight Ltd, s.f.), it is relevant to know whether or not the respondents consider they have enough training to deal with customer complaints. Eight respondents answered that they think they have enough training to do so, and six respondents answered that they have not received enough training (see Figure 12).

Do you think you have enough training to deal with customers' problems?

14 responses

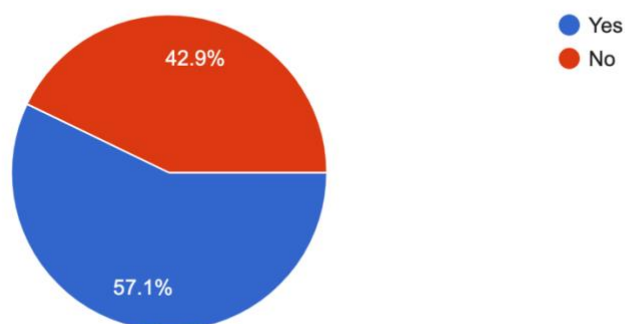


Figure 12 Questionnaire: Training

Respondents were asked whether they received any kind of training from the restaurant. Fifty percent answered “Yes” and 50% answered “No” (see Figure 13).

Did you get any kind of training from the restaurant to solve disputes when those have arisen?
14 responses

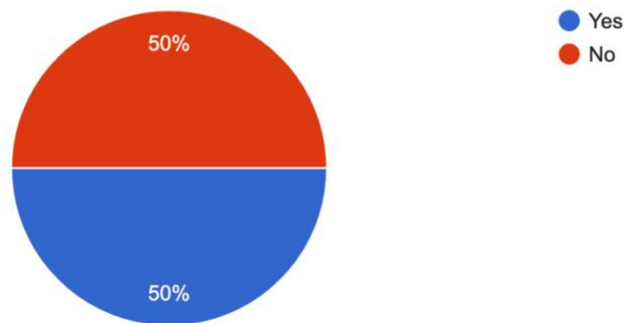


Figure 13 Questionnaire: Restaurant training

Respondents were asked whether the restaurant had an official procedure to deal with complaints. Ten respondents replied that they do not know, three respondents answered “Yes”, and only one person said “No” (see Figure 14).

Is there an official procedure in place to deal with complaints?
14 responses

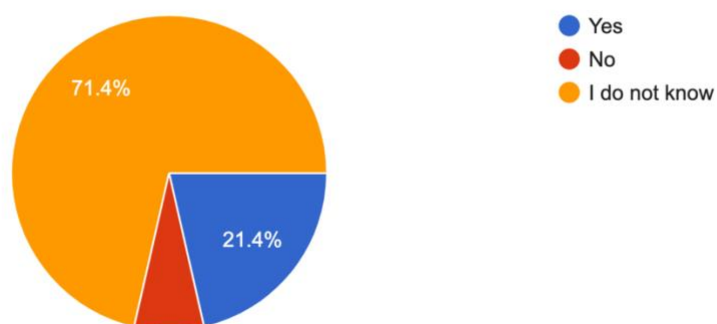


Figure 14 Questionnaire: Official procedures

The last question of the questionnaire asked respondents whether they would like to add anything that they considered important concerning customer service. Six respondents added a comment. Two respondents agreed that for some time they did not feel qualified to deal with problems. One

respondent replied that customers should be treated as everybody would like to be treated and one respondent suggested that it is important to always have a smile. One respondent noted that his or her reaction depended on the customer's attitude. Verbatim responses are listed in Appendix I.

Survey data

The general public survey was carried out to determine how often people eat out in restaurants and their reasons for eating out. The survey also sought to determine bad customer experiences and reactions to the issues that can arise when eating out. Another reason was to find out under what circumstances customers are more likely complaint or not register complaints at all, while trying to determine how customers prefer to be compensated for a bad experience. The responses of the 101 survey respondents are presented below.

The following figures show the basic demographic data of the respondents in the current research.

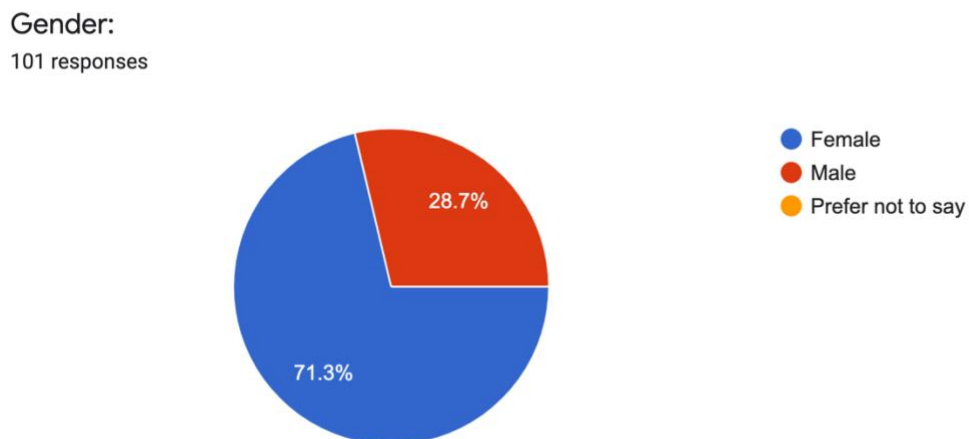


Figure 15 Survey: Gender

Seventy-two respondents were female and 28 were male, of which four were over 56 years old, nine between 18 and 25, 14 between 46 and 55, 32 between 36 and 45 and 42 people between 26 and 35 years old (see figure 15 and 16).

Age:

101 responses

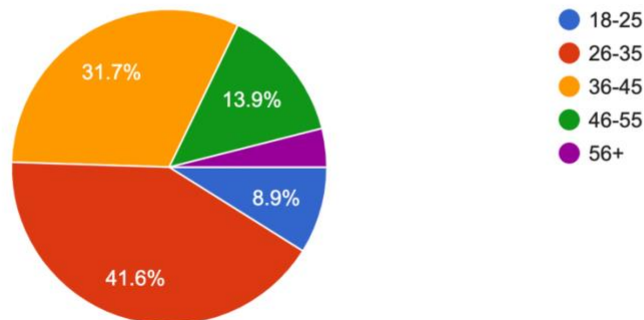


Figure 16 Survey: Age

When asked how often respondents eat out in restaurants, 16 responded a few times per week, 19 respondents eat out once per week, 33 respondents a couple of times per month, 14 respondents eat out once a month, and 19 respondents eat out less than once per month (see Figure 17).

How often do you eat out in a restaurant?

101 responses

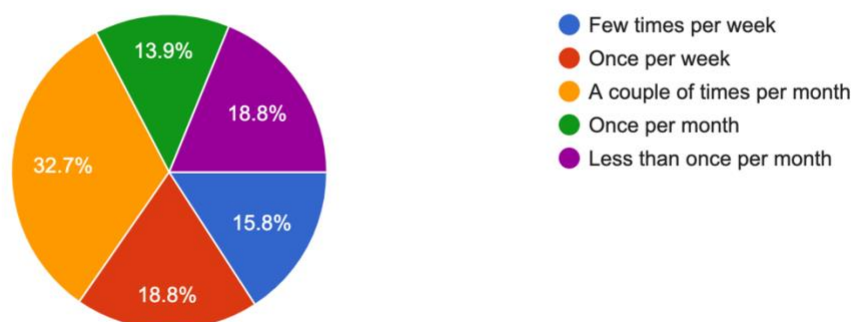


Figure 17 Survey: Frequency

Respondents were also asked what types of meals they would go out for. Fifty-seven respondents were inclined to eat out for dinner. Twenty-six respondents said that they go out for lunch, while eleven respondents said that they go out for brunch and six of the 101 respondents were more likely to eat out for breakfast (see Figure 18).

What are you more likely to eat out for?
101 responses

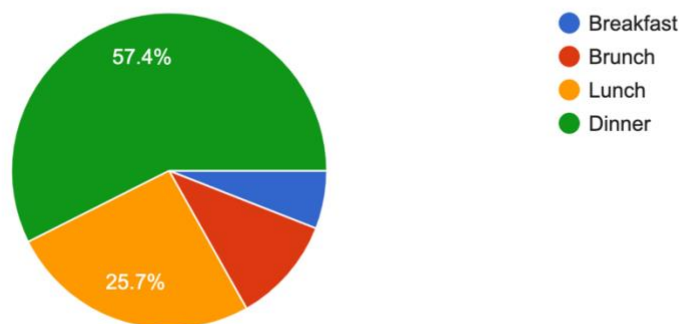


Figure 18 Survey: People is likely to eat out for:

To determine the main aspects when choosing or rating a restaurant, respondents were asked to pick one of the options suggested or they could formulate their own answer. For the majority of the respondents (67), the most important aspect was the food quality. For 27 respondents friendliness of the staff was the most important aspect of a restaurant. For two respondents the speed of service was the most important thing. For another two respondents service and food were both important. However, one of the respondents answered that all aspects were important. Another respondent replied that cleanliness, price and choice on the menu were most important. One respondent replied that child-friendly premises, kids' menu options and value for money were the most important aspects (see Figure 19).

What is the most important aspect for you when in a restaurant:

101 responses



Figure 19 Survey: Important aspects

Respondents were asked whether they would recommend a restaurant with good service to other people. Thirty-two respondents answered that they have never recommended a restaurant just for its good service. However, 69 respondents said that they have (see Figure 20).

Have you ever recommended a restaurant only because they have an excellent service?

101 responses

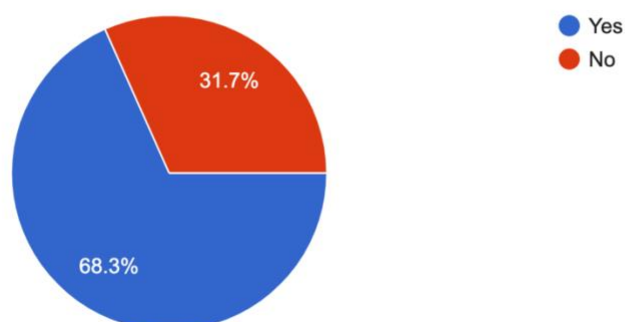


Figure 20 Survey: Recommendation based on service

In order to determine whether a restaurant could recover after having provided poor service, respondents were asked whether they would return to this restaurant. Seventeen respondents said that

they would return to a restaurant with poor service just for their good food, 41 said that they would not, and 43 said that they maybe would (see Figure 21).

Will you go back to a restaurant with bad service only because the food is great?

101 responses

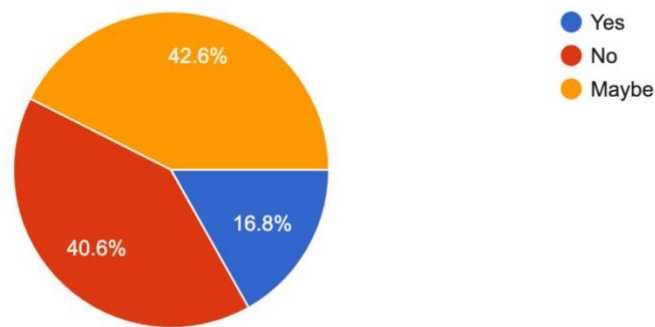


Figure 21 Survey: Customers returning due to good food

It was important to ask the respondents the reason they would return to the same restaurant to know what the main factors in customer retention are. Sixty-eight of the 101 respondents think that they would return to the same restaurant for the food quality and 31 due to the friendliness of the staff. One respondent replied that they would return because of the speed of food delivery. One respondent wrote that it depends on the night what is the most important (see Figure 22).

You are more likely to return to the same restaurant due to:

101 responses

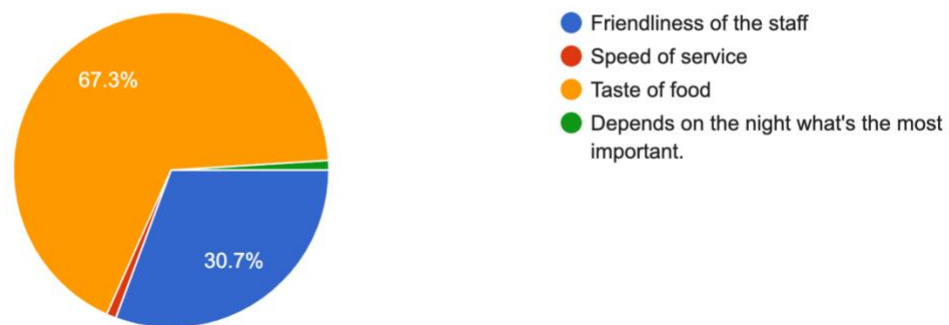


Figure 22 Survey: Returning motives

The next four questions are related to each other to determine bad experiences that respondents have had when in a restaurant and see how they handled these experiences. Additionally, the questions are aimed at determining what actions the restaurant took in this regard.

First, the respondents were invited to share their last bad experience when in a restaurant. Eighty-one responses were obtained. Answers were catalogued in five different sections from which for 17 respondents their bad experiences were in relation to poor food quality, 13 responses were in relation to rude staff, 18 respondents had problems with bad service and 21 said the service was slow. Others mentioned that the music was very loud, that children were noisy, and that the seating area was small, among other responses (see Figure 23).

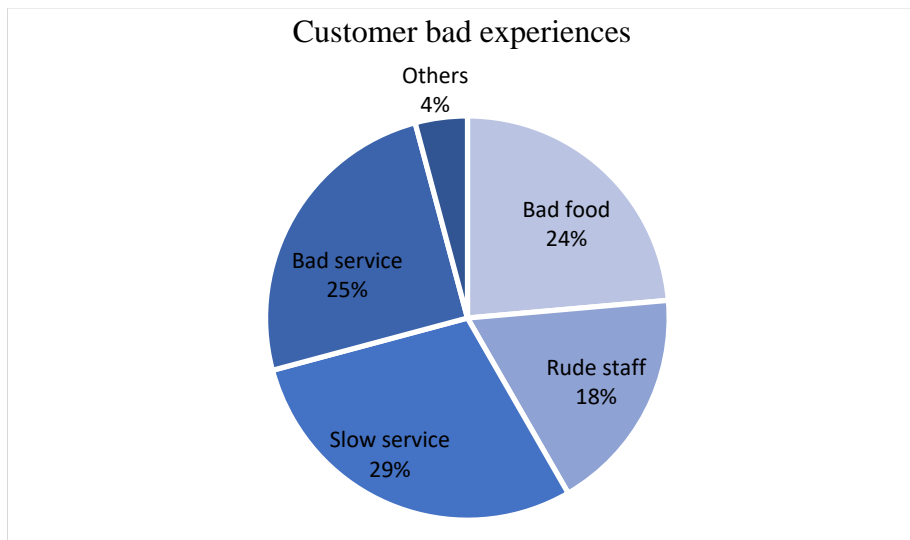


Figure 23 Survey: Customer bad experiences

Some answers were too long to show in a table. Table 1 shows how the answers were classified.

However, verbatim response can be found in Appendix J

| Bad food | Rude staff | Slow service | Bad service | others |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Bad layout and food not up to standard | Rude waitress | Slow service food took over an hour from ordering | Staff ignorance | Music too loud, heater blasting into my face |
| Bad food | Rude staff | Reheated food because it took so long | Ignorant staff | Small sitting area in Wagamama |
| Not very tasty food | Rude staff not helpful | Slow service food took over an hour from ordering | Poor customer service skills | Noisey children |
| Boured chicken nuggets for kids | Very bad staff, rude and having the staff break because of us | Very slow service | Wrong order and waiting too long | |
| Poor quality food | Rude waiter | Waited for long time for one starter when family had to wait | Order incorrect | |
| Food was tasteless and bland. Rice wasn't cooked | Went to a pizza place where the staff were rude and | I was told 10 minutes after I ordered something it was | Missing items we ordered | |
| Below average food | The waiter butted in on our conversation | Waited for long time for one starter when family had to wait | Having to ask 3 different staff members for the same | |
| Cold food. | Unprofessional staff | Slow service in a high end restraint. Very long wait | Requested Gluten Free Bread and they brought bread | |
| Food which I ordered looked beautiful on the plate | A waiter ignoring me and kept serving others before | very slow service | Feeling unwell after food and the way the service was | |
| I had seafood in restaurant a few months ago, it was | Rude waiter | Told 10 minutes for table. Left 2 hours waiting on coffee | Forgetting orders , delayed | |
| Food not of good quality and not freshly cooked | When the waiter kept coming over to the table asking | Left waiting ages, waitress forgetting to come back | Mix up of food and poor service | |
| Food was average not what was recommended to me | The waitress was hurry us up to leave the table | Belated service | did not accept error made by them while ordering and | |
| A steak. Too tough | Just a rude waiter that is all | I was under charged (about 50% when there was a | Bad service and bad food | |
| Bad food. | | Waiting 30 minutes for our second coffee to arrive. | Staff not returning to see if you needed anything else | |
| Bad cooking | | Very slow service | Feeling unwell after food and the way the service was | |
| Dinner was overcooked | | Waiting too long to be served | I went for dinner with 2 friends, 1 dish was forgotten | |
| Bad service and bad food | | Wrong order and waiting too long | I went to a restaurant with a group of 6 of us. We were | |
| | | Slow service | Bad experience in a restaurant we had wanted to go to | |
| | | Forgetting orders , delayed | | |
| | | Impersonal, slow food, I think they forgot about us. | | |
| | | Waiting 1 hour for food | | |

Table 1 Survey: Customer last bad experience

In continuation to the previous question, respondents were asked whether they brought the problem with the restaurant staff to the team's attention. Forty-seven respondents said they did bring their complaint to the teams's attention and 39 did not. This question was not applicable to the remainder of the respondents (see Figure 24).

Did you bring the problem to the team's attention?
101 responses

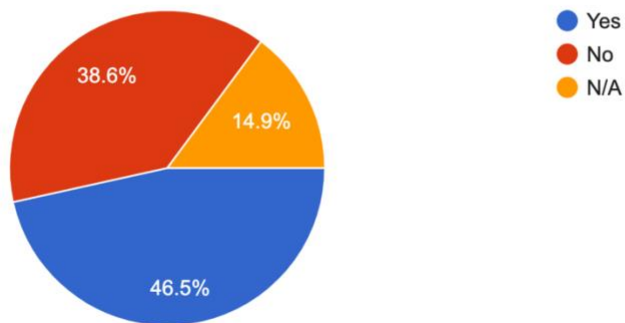


Figure 24 Survey: Problems reported to the team

Next, respondents were asked whether a member of the staff compensated the respondents for the bad experience. Forty-two respondents answered “No” and 26 “Yes”. For the remainder of the respondents, this question was not applicable (see Figure 25).

Did a member of the staff do something to compensate you for the bad experience?
101 responses

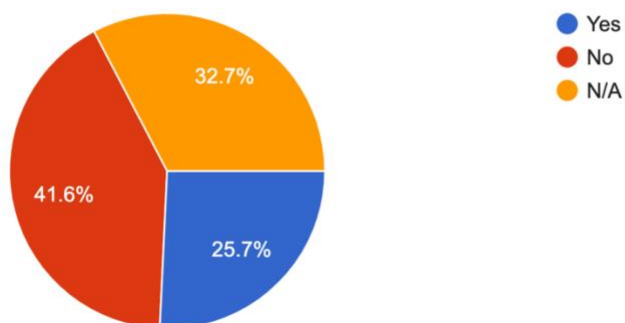


Figure 25 Survey: Staff compensation actions

The respondents were asked to share how the restaurant compensated them after they had a bad experience. Table 2 shows the 23 verbatim responses obtained from the respondents.

| Something free of charge | Apologizes | Discounts or free meals | Discounts on the next visit | Others |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Free starter and desert | Just appologised | They still didn't charge full | Offered me back for a meal | Gave dirty looks |
| They comped Ye dinner and free dessert | Just apologised for the delay | Offered to take the meal off the bill | I sent a email as was upset and they said they had the surprise | No |
| Complimentary drink | They gave cold apologise. | Free meal | | None |
| Gave us an extra dessert free but | | No charge. | | The restaurant manager moved |
| | | Discount | | They were ignoring us |
| | | They took one of our dishes off | | |
| | | Didn't charge for main course | | |
| | | I didn't need to pay my bill | | |
| | | They gave a discount on our bill | | |

Table 2 Survey: How restaurants compensate

The responses were separated and classified into five segments that are listed in Table 2. Four respondents received something for free in compensation, three received apologies, two were promised discounts on their next visit, and nine received a discount on their bill or one free meal. Others received nothing in compensation (see Figure 26).

How restaurants compensate

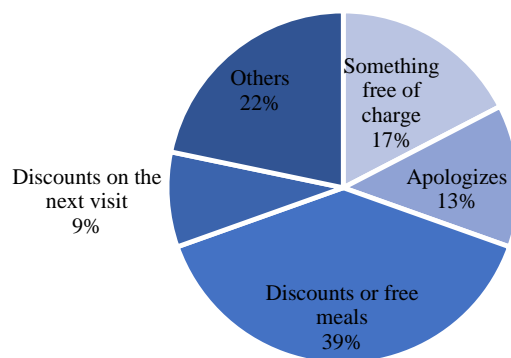


Figure 26 Survey: How restaurants compensate

Furthermore, respondents were asked whether the actions taken by the restaurants helped to win them back after having the bad experience. Nineteen respondents answered “Yes”, 41 “No” and 13 partially. For the remainder of the respondents, this question was not applicable (see Figure 27).

Did they win you back?
101 responses

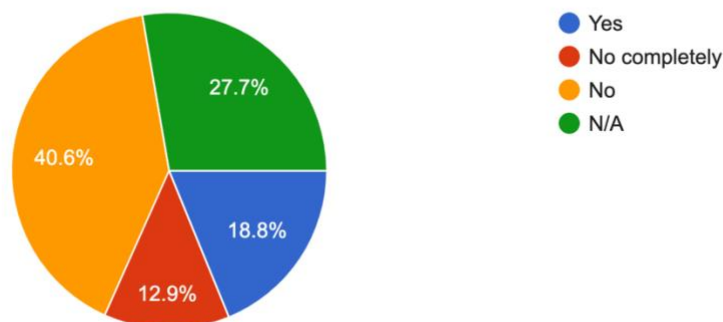


Figure 27 Survey: Recovery

The respondents were asked when they had a bad experience where or when they presented their complaints. Fifty-nine respondents usually complain at the time to the manager or a staff member. Thirty-nine respondents said they would tell family and friends about their bad experience. One respondent replied that he expresses his discontent on social media. One respondent wrote that they would voice their complaint privately on the website or by mail. Another respondent said they were unlikely to complain, as they live in a small town with few restaurants (see Figure 28).

When you have a bad experience in a restaurant when or where are you more likely to make a complaint?

101 responses

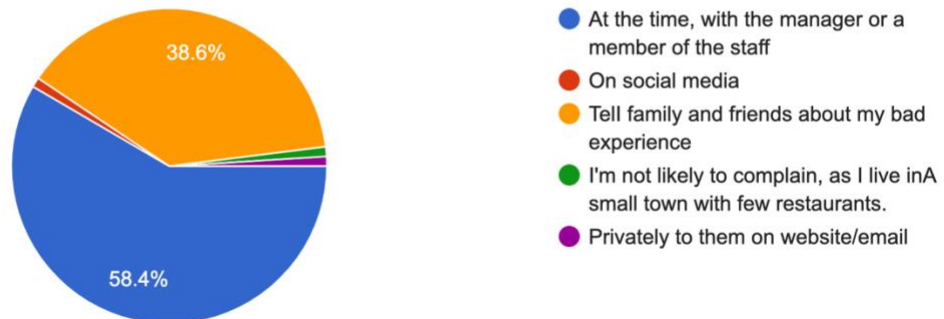


Figure 28 Survey: Complaints procedures

Respondents were then asked which online medium they used most when making a complaint. In this question, multiple selections were enabled. In other words, one respondent could select more than one option. Not having used any social media was selected by 61 respondents, TripAdvisor was selected by 21 respondents, the restaurant's Facebook page scored 15, the online restaurant survey eight, Twitter four, Direct email to the restaurant two and Instagram and Yelp one each (see Figure 29).

If you have made a complaint on social media, which have you used?

101 responses

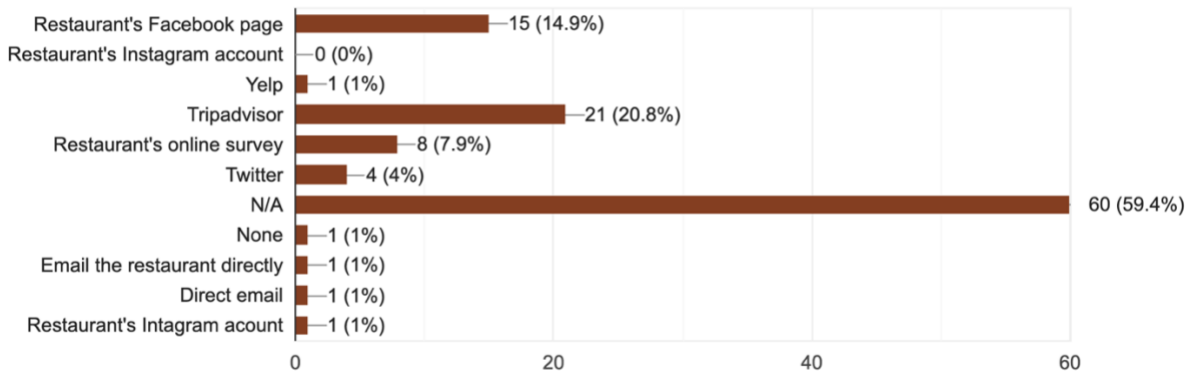


Figure 29 Survey: Complaints on social media

In order to know which measures can work successfully to recover the customer, the respondents were asked to choose between five options or to write their own ideas. Forty-five respondents selected that an apology of a member of the staff would suffice, 32 a bill discount, eight a discount on their next visit, eight a free dessert and three free after-dinner coffee. One respondent wrote, honest acknowledgment by senior [management] and the rest said it depends on the issue (see Figure 30).

When you have a bad experience in a restaurant how would you like it to be solved?

101 responses



Figure 30 Survey: Suggested Solutions

Finally, respondents were asked whether they had ever made a complaint exclusively with the intention of getting something for free from the restaurant, All respondents (100%) replied “No” (see Figure 31).

Being completely honest, have you ever complained in a restaurant just to see if you can get something free of charge?

101 responses

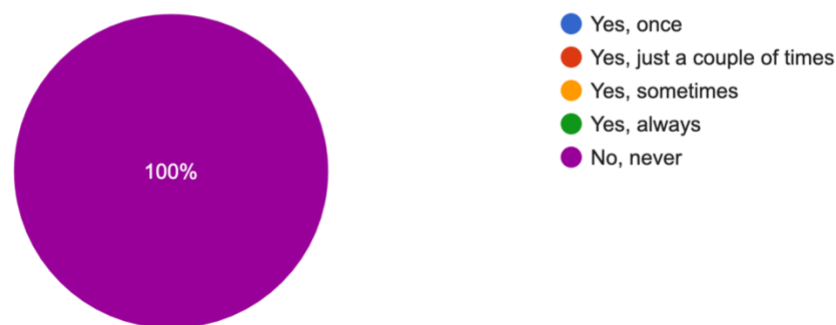


Figure 31 Survey: Complaints to get something free of charge

Interviews data

Two interviews were conducted, one with the general manager and the other with the assistant manager of the same restaurant where the questionnaires were completed by the waiters and support staff in order to determine the frequency with which they faced conflicts with customers and to determine the cause of conflict.

It was also important to know how serious complaints can be, how the restaurant should respond to problems that arise with customers, whether the restaurant was aware of the repercussions of bad feedback and how to handled bad feedback. The current research also sought to explore the protocols observed by the restaurant and whether such protocols were in place. Interviewees were asked about levels of training to enable them to solve conflicts with customers. Interview transcripts with the assistant manager and general manager of the restaurant can be found in appendices G and H.

Assistant Manager Interview

The assistant manager has been working for the restaurant in his current position for three years and has managed around 80 staff members. Having worked in hospitality for six years, he does not see himself working for the restaurant in the future if he can find another job. However, the assistant manager says he feels happy working for the restaurant.

As to whether an official procedure to handle and record complaints was in place, the assistant manager said that there is a manager's diary in which they write down the important things that happen in the restaurant. The assistant manager notes, however, that no protocol is in place as such, unless a very serious problem is involved such as a violent situation that needs to be escalated. The assistant manager says that usually he deals with major complaints from customers on a daily basis. However, there are likely to be more complaints. The assistant manager said complaints are mainly related to speed of service or poor food quality.

When a customer reports a problem, the first thing the assistant manager does is to go to the table and ask the customers what the issue is. Then he listen and tries to explain without justifying what went wrong, to then fix the situation and, depending on whether customers are upset or not, he talks to them a little more. If the assistant manager realize that customers are angry, however, he does not speak much because he considers that it is not what the customer wants.

The assistant manager affirms that no official procedure is in place that employees should follow in case of customer complaints. However a guideline for managers stipulates that the customer should not be confronted nor that excuses should be made to the customer. Managers can go to the table, apologize to the customer and fix the issue but if the customer is being aggressive and offensive, nothing can be done according to what the company says to which he personally does not agree. The actions that he should take are not engaging with customers, asking why the customer is not happy, and fix the problem.

The assistant manager says that he had not acquired any training from the restaurant to deal with customer complaints. Learning only from observing other people's work. Considering the job to be more about common sense, the assistant manager believes he has enough training to deal with customer complaints.

The assistant manager is of the opinion that the impact of bad feedback from a customer after a bad experience in the restaurant is significant, especially if it is the first time the customer is visiting the restaurant. The chances of that customer returning to the restaurant are low. Besides, if the customer tells his friends or family about his bad experience, that may be enough for another seven or eight people to not go to the restaurant. The assistant manager, therefore, believes it is important to have an official protocol for dealing with customer complaints and he would adhere to one if it were to be developed.

General Manager Interview

The general manager has been a manager for three years and has managed 40 staff members. She has worked in hospitality for six years but does not see herself working in the restaurant for years to come. The general manager commented that there is no official procedure for handling and recording complaints, apart from customers going to the restaurant's website where they can register their complaints, A restaurant representative then investigates the situation and contacts the customer with a solution. If customers make a complaint at the restaurant then the manager on duty will deal with it. Only in case of a big incident the complaint would be recorded.

The manager comments that generally no customers issues occur if the shift is going smoothly and the customers are pleased. A given day can produce no complaints or ten, depending on customers and staff. The manager said that most customer complaints are related to attentiveness of the staff and delays due to slow service. The general manager also says that if the waiter can deal with the

customer complaint she does nothing as a manager, but usually asks the waiters whether they need her support. If they can handle it themselves, the general manager does not get involved since she believes that issues do not always need the manager and that it gives the staff confidence to allow them to resolve issues by themselves. The general manager only goes to a table if waiters consider it necessary.

When the general manager goes to a table to deal with customer complaints after listening to the customer, she apologizes. Then she finds out how she can help to overcome the issue. She considers that customers are there to have a good time, so, depending on what the customer wants, she gives them another meal, free drinks or discounts from the bill, but that depends on the customer.

The general Manager says, as well, that after receiving a complaint the staff member should see what he or she can do for customers who have complained, resolve the issue, apologize and invite customers to return to the restaurant. Only in case of serious issues, reports should be made to the manager.

The general manager does exactly the same thing as the waiters when handling complaints. If a serious problem with customers occurs, the general manager reports to her superiors that something went wrong. In fact, the general manager did not receive any training to deal with customer complaints and considers that there is no training to deal with customer complaints. She considers problems come from customers having a bad day, from children being noisy or maybe being dumped by their partner. So, the general manager continues, it cannot be said that there are steps to be taken when there are problems with customers in the restaurant. However, she also considers that there are steps to deal with complaints only if there is something in the food of the customer or if someone gets sick, but she maintains that no one can be trained to be friendly or have people skills.

The general manager believes that bad feedback on social media definitely affects the way people see the company and its brand. It would have negatively impact sales and staff morale. Bad publicity can result in losing money and customers as well as their recommendations.

The general manager considers it important to have a protocol to deal with complaints but says that people cannot be robots. A protocol cannot prescribe step by step what has to be done. However, the general manager says she would adhere to a protocol if it were developed. The general manager also suggests following the steps of apologizing, determining what has happened, empathizing by trying to feel what customers feel and trying to see what can be done for customers. In addition, the general manager believes that people need to be treated as everybody would like to be treated. Customers should be treated with kindness and care, no matter how bad they can make the staff feel. She also shares that listening is the first step in dealing with any type of complaint.

Chapter 4 - Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter analyses the data obtained from the questionnaires completed by the restaurant waiters and support staff, the interviews with the restaurant managers, and the survey responses. The questionnaire and survey responses were analysed in Microsoft Excel.

Questionnaire and interviews analysis

Gender and age of the restaurant waiters and support staff were not found to be a factor influencing the answers to other questions. No correlation was found between the waiters and support staff who either depend or not on the job as their main source of income or from those that job is their only source of income with the importance that has to them the satisfaction and recovery of customers. Neither was this found to be related to their interest in improving their skills as a waiter or waitress.

Despite the fact that 60% of waiters and support staff do not see themselves working in the restaurant in the future, 80% are interested in improving their skills as waiters and they care about the satisfaction and recovery of customers after they make a complaint. As for managers, the assistant manager does not see himself working in the restaurant if he has a better opportunity. The general manager does not see herself working in the restaurant in years to come. However, both managers are willing to cooperate with the integration of a protocol and observe such a protocol in order to deal with complaints.

The experience of waiters and support staff in connection with working in hospitality does not influence their perceptions as to whether they are sufficiently trained to deal with customer complaints. Some staff with less than two years of experience feel that they have received sufficient training, while others with more experience do not feel they have received enough training (see Figure 32).

| How many years of experience working in hospitality do you have? | Do you think you have enough training to deal with customers' problems? |
|--|---|
| 1-2 | No |
| 9+ | No |
| 1-2 | No |
| 9+ | Yes |
| 1-2 | Yes |
| 1-5 | Yes |
| Less than 1 | Yes |
| 1-2 | Yes |
| 1-2 | Yes |
| 9+ | Yes |
| 1-2 | No |
| 1-5 | Yes |
| 1-2 | No |
| 1-5 | No |

Figure 32 Findings

Although three respondents say that the restaurant had an official procedure to deal with customer complaints, the interviews with the general and assistant managers show that this is not the case. There is no official procedure to deal with customer complaints or a guideline to record every complaint the customer has. The managers do mention a diary in which they write down important issues that happen in the restaurant. If something serious happens, the managers report such incidents to their superiors. Respondents who said that there was an official procedure to deal with complaints gave vague and varying answers (see Figure 33) when asked what would be the first thing they would do when they have a problem with a customer, which shows that no protocol is being followed.

| | |
|---|--|
| When you have a problem with a customer what is the first thing you do? | Is there an official procedure in place to deal with complaints? |
| Listen | Yes |
| Call the manager | Yes |
| Be nice to them | Yes |

Figure 33 Findings

The general manager states that there are days when there are no complaints from customers, while the assistant manager mentions that at least one customer complaint per day is registered.

“... A certain number of complaints we receive a day. It can be none or it can be ten. That depends very much on the customers or the team.” (AA, 2020) (39-40)

“... I would say probably on average maybe once a day, I’d say, I think is fair.” “... Probably more actually, you know, but I’m thinking about like serious complaints.” (FV.2020) (83,86)

However, we can see that only 60% of the staff always report when a customer has a complaint to managers. This tells us that managers are not aware of 100% of the complaints that actually happen in the restaurant.

Most waiters and support staff do not know whether or not the restaurant has an official customer complaints procedure. 50% of the waiters and support staff said that they have not received any training to deal with customer complaints. However, 57% said they feel capable dealing with complaints. When asked what they would do when a customer complaints, on the other hand, some staff gave responses that could be considered as first steps towards complaint resolution (see Figure 34).

| |
|--|
| When you have a problem with a customer what is the first thing you do? |
| Try to think of the best solutions for the issue |
| Keep calm and see can I sort the problem as quickly as possible |
| Be nice to them |
| Apologize |
| If I can resolve the problem then I'll do so. Otherwise I'll go to an assistant |
| Trying to find the best solution for customer !! |
| I apologise |
| Try to see if the problem is easily solvable on my own before going to a manager |
| Call the manager |
| Asking help from the manager |
| Listen |
| I apologize and try to find a way to solve the problem without major consequences. |
| Getting to the core of the problem, e.g if a customer complains that there is not enough chicken in their salad I need to find out if there wasn't enough chicken relative to restaurant's usual standards or if the customers expectations exceeded the restaurants standard practices. |

Figure 34 Findings

Neither manager received training to deal with customer complaints. However, both managers feel capable of doing their jobs as required. They have the same approach: they listen to the customer, apologise and then see what they can do to win customers back and limit further escalation. Both managers consider that bad customer feedback is a threat to business and can negatively affect the restaurant in terms of reputation and revenue.

Sixty percent of waiters and support staff said that customer complaints are mainly related to kitchen mistakes. Managers said that customer complaints are mostly related to attentiveness of the staff, speed of services and poor food quality.

Seventy percent of waiters and support staff care and try to do their best for the customer to ensure customer satisfaction. The remainder would make an effort to satisfy customers, even though they are not interested in doing it.

Survey Analysis

57% of respondents are more likely to go to a restaurant for dinner; 6% of respondents are more likely to go to restaurants for breakfast.

Respondents over the age of 56 are more likely to go to restaurants for brunch, lunch or breakfast. None of them answered that they would go for dinner. Respondents between the ages of 26 and 55 go for dinner more frequently. Respondents in the 18-to-25 age group go out more frequently to restaurants for lunch and dinner, while none said that they go out for lunch or brunch. Both men and women go out to restaurants more frequently for dinner. However, 90% of respondents who go out for brunch are women.

35% of respondents go to restaurants at least once a week. However 20% do so less than once a month. 55% of the male respondents go to restaurants at least once a week, while only 25% of women do the same.

Research has found that for 67% of the respondents, the most important thing is food quality. However, for 27%, the most important thing is the friendliness of the staff when in a restaurant. Similarly, 69% of the respondents said that they would return to the same restaurant because the food is great, but 30% would return due to the friendliness of the staff. However, some respondents, for whom food quality is the most important thing in a restaurant, said that they would return to the same restaurant due to the friendliness of the staff, and some respondent for whom friendliness of the staff is the most important thing in a restaurant, said that they would return to the same restaurant due to food quality.

For 80% of men, food quality is the most important thing when they go to a restaurant, while 24% of them would return to the same restaurant due to the friendliness of the staff.

For 60% of women, food quality is the most important, and 30% would return to the same restaurant due to the friendliness of the staff.

Seventy percent of respondents said they have recommended a restaurant because of their excellent service, while 17% would return to a restaurant with poor service just because the food is good.

Sixty percent of respondents are more likely to make a complaint to the manager or a staff member when the issue happens, 37% tell their family and friends about the bad experience and 3% complain in another manner.

Sixty percent of respondents have not used a social media to complain. However, those who have done so mostly do complain on TripAdvisor or on the restaurant's Facebook page. Gender or age have not show any pattern in those who have used social media to make a complaint

For 40% of respondents an apology is enough to resolve a bad restaurant experience. However, 30% would like it to be resolved with a bill discount. Forty percent of women and 50 % of men can be won back with an apology. In addition, compared to women, men value food quality more and are more likely to be won back with just an apology.

The survey shows that none of the participants have ever complained in a restaurant just to see if they can get something free of charge.

In the section of the survey where the participants were invited to share their last bad experience when in a restaurant, the following answers were provided:

Most of the problems were related to slow service followed by bad service and rude staff., Twenty-four percent of the problems were related to food.

Of the customers who experienced problems, 50% complained to the staff. Of those who reported the problem, 45% of restaurants compensated them for the bad experience. Of those who compensated for the bad experience, 40% did so with a discount or free food and 13% with apologies. Forty-five percent of those who reported the problem were won back by way of a discount or something free of charge. None of the customers who complained were won back through an apology.

The current research found that 60% of respondents who did not bring the problem to the restaurant tell their family and friends about their bad experience. Additionally, 40% of them replied that they can be won back with just an apology.

Conclusion

With the previously analysed data shows that the restaurant in which the investigation was conducted does not have a official protocol to follow when customer complaints are presented, nor does it have a logbook where customer complaints are recorded. Neither managers nor waiters and support staff received formal training from the restaurant to deal with customer complaints. However, most of them have a willingness to improve their skills at the restaurant and win back customers.

Despite the fact that 57% of waiters and support staff said in the questionnaire that customer complaints are mainly related to kitchen mistakes, the main problems customer face are service-related.

The survey shows that an apology is a good start towards winning back a customer, since for many respondents this could be enough when they have a problem when in restaurants. None of the waiters and support staff mentioned giving something for free or giving customers a discount when dealing with a complaint. However, the survey shows that applying a discount to the customer's bill or offering something free of charge is more effective.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings from the questionnaires completed by the waiters and support staff, the interviews with the restaurant managers and the survey among members of the public. This chapter also compares the data from the respondents with the literature in order to present and clarify the findings.

The hospitality industry, especially the food service area, is growing. This has been shown by various statistics (Bord Bia Irish Food Board, 2019). It is increasingly important to provide good service to gain and retain competitive edge.

Despite the fact that in a restaurant food quality is the most important element, service, although it is intangible, is also important (Greasley, 2013). This research has identified that for 70% of participants, food is the most important element. However, only 20% of respondents would return to a restaurant with poor service. Service plays a critical role in the customer experience and a positive customer experience of quality service adds value to the food (Drinks Industry Ireland, 2019).

This research found that 70% of survey respondents have recommended a restaurant just for having good service and that 30% would return to the same restaurant due to the friendliness of the staff. This could be one of the reasons why customer experience has a better competitive advantage than cost reduction as the study carried out by Walker (2020) says. Future research could be done to verify this claim.

In disagreement with the study carried out for American Express (2017) in which nine out of ten respondents tell others about their bad experience in this study, only four out of ten tell family and friends about their bad experience. However, American Express research was conducted in the United States, which means that the results are subject to geographic differences and to cultural differences as well.

Kirti et al. (2007) conclude that offering something in compensation for service failure works better than offering an apology to customers. Since the respondents in the current research who said they had been recovered from their bad experience were the same respondents who were offered something by way of compensation this study agrees with Kirti et al. that giving something in compensation to customers works better. However, most customers expect to receive an apology from the restaurant after a bad experience.

If restaurants expect to achieve full recovery of customers, they must offer something in return by way of compensation. Barlow & Møller (2008) states that companies can create a feeling of reciprocity by taking customers' complaints seriously and offering a price reduction, or no charge at all, if that is appropriate, a sincere apology or free product, and assurance that something has been changed inside the organization so this will not happen again. In this study, the bill discount was shown as the preferred compensation after the apology for the respondents.

The most recurring problem that respondents in this study shared was slow service. This is in line with Greasley's (2013) point that customers do not like to wait when they are in a restaurant, especially when there is no reason for delay. Everything should be done quickly especially when it comes to customer recovery.

This research found that most customers after having a bad experience complain in the restaurant. This is where the waiters and managers have the opportunity to take quick action to stop the conflict and to recover the customer. Barlow & Møller (2008) state that if a customer leaves without saying they are dissatisfied, they do not give the organization any opportunity to amend their dissatisfaction. Thus, customers who are complaining are communicating and giving the restaurant the opportunity to win back customers so they can be converted into repeat business. Kayden, et al. (2008) make the point that not all conflicts can be resolved but learning to handle them in a timely manner will contain issues and avoid escalation.

The survey shows that 40% of respondents do not complain when they have a bad experience in restaurants. Based on this it can be said that the fact that the customer does not complain does not mean that the customer did not have a bad experience. A customer who does not express their complaint is unlikely to return to the restaurant as it does not give the staff the opportunity to correct the bad experience, which confirms the article “*The Fine Art of Complaining*”, which found that customers do not like to complain. Customers are uncomfortable with registering complaints, so they simply do not return to the restaurant and never say why (Judkis, 2015).

Contrary to Judkis (2015) who says that some clients complain about service or food with the only purpose of getting something free of charge or to not have to pay the bill, the current research shows that none of the respondents had ever complained in a restaurant just to see if they can get something free of charge. Even if that were the case Judkis (2015) recommends to restaurant staff members not to engage with customers and act as if it had been their mistake.

In her interview, the general manager states that staff members are not robots, so a protocol cannot be made. However in *What Makes Great Service?* (2020) assure that a good restaurant relies on its staff to handle any situation. Customer-facing staff may well be trained to be more responsive and sensitive to customer needs, thus providing services that are more efficient and effective. In addition to what Barlow & Møller (2008) say that many individuals and companies have learned to handle complaints better, many companies have educated their staff in the best ways of responding to dissatisfied customers. According to *What Makes Great Service?* (2020) training can make a difference in turning a bad customer experience into a good one. However, the current research shows that restaurant staff are not formally trained and do not follow a protocol to handle customer complaints. however it would be a good competitive advantage to implement a protocol in the restaurant to deal with customer complaints.

It was found that most respondents used TripAdvisor to complain about a restaurant. TripAdvisor, (2019) reported that they influenced almost USD 8 billion in global diner spending, which means that bad feedback can seriously affect a restaurant sales and profits and not only image or reputation.

To summarize, the main reason why customers visit a restaurant is food quality, but it has been shown that service and quick recovery of the customer after a bad experience in restaurants are also important if sales and regular customers are to be retained. Due to the low likelihood that customers will return to a restaurant where they had a bad experience, said the current research shows that the customer goes to a restaurant for the food quality but returns due the good service. Therefore, it is suggested to the restaurant where this research was conducted record customer complaints in order to develop effective solutions for complaints that staff deal with on a frequent basis. Consequently, It is also suggested to Managers to approach to each table to see whether everything is going well with customers because some customers do not feel comfortable complaining. This can create an environment of confidence in which customers give the restaurant the opportunity to correct their mistakes.

Conclusion

The methodology used was the most appropriate option for the development of this dissertation, because restaurant managers were more willing to give interviews than to complete questionnaires as the former was easier and faster for them. In addition, the interview format provided the opportunity to ask the managers follow-up questions, which helped to clarify certain points. The restaurant staff, on the other hand, were open to answering the questionnaire since that helped them to provide their answers anonymously, which made it possible to obtain honest and sincere answers. The best option in terms of getting responses from members of the public was to carry out a survey as it was a large sample. The literature comprised in this dissertation is relevant to the research topic. Current theories, statistics and arguments that contributed and justify the development of this paper were highlighted.

This research identifies factors that were important to consider in conflict resolution between customers and restaurants. It also showed how customers can be recovered from a bad experience and how the behaviour of customer-facing restaurant staff can be.

This research indicates that the restaurant where the investigation was carried out did not have strategies to deal with and resolve customer complaints, nor is a protocol in place to process and record customer complaints. However, the current research identifies that some customer-facing staff usually take actions that according to the literature can lead to customer recovery when service fails.

It was discovered that the main factors for a customer when choosing a restaurant were food and service, in that order. Being that most customers did not believe possible to return to a restaurant where they had had a bad experience, even if the restaurant has good food, which proved the importance of good service. The restaurant staff reported that customer complaints mainly result from kitchen mistakes. However, the survey showed that problems were predominantly in relation to the

service. Customers face conflicts created by rude staff and slow and bad service were seen, by far, as greater problems than food-quality-related issues. Few customers had used social media to voice their complaints, while most prefer to complain in the restaurant when the conflict happens. Those who used social media were likely to use TripAdvisor and the restaurant's Facebook page.

The most effective way to recover customers after having a bad experience in a restaurant were giving an apology and providing something free of charge. Most respondents answered that an apology was enough, but they were recovered after having obtained something free of charge from the restaurant by way of compensation. However, it is concluded that both resolutions are important for customer recovery: an apology as a first step followed by compensation depending on the severity of the conflict. This research contributes to the literature by creating an understanding of the perspective of customers towards what service recovery actions are. Conflict resolution between customers and restaurants may be possible if action is taken immediately after the failure occurs and before customers leave the restaurant unsatisfied or before they place bad feedback on social media, which affects the image of the restaurant or results in loss of repeat business.

However, some findings that were particular to this topic were not found in the literature, such as the unexpected finding that customers do not complain to get something free of charge, and that women are more likely to go for brunch than men. This means that important data for the sector have been discovered, speaking exclusively for the Irish market, since most of the previous researches had been carried out in larger countries such as the United States. The current research therefore fills a gap in the restaurant sector in the literature dealing with the Irish hospitality market.

Finally, the data collected by this research can be useful for those who are researching in the hospitality sector, the restaurant industry, and the food market, as well as for those who manage full-service restaurants. This research can be used to develop customer recovery protocols or for future research. This research helps the reader understand the importance of conflict resolution in the

restaurant sector as well as the importance of service and trained staff in handling customer complaints.

Further research

For future research on the subject, it is recommended to expand the sample of restaurants, since in this study only one restaurant was analysed. The relevant findings in the current research cannot be generalized therefore. However, future research may expand the sample to discover whether or not the lack of protocols for dealing with customer complaints is a general issue. Expanding the survey sample to the wider Irish population will allow more discoveries based on age and gender, as well as provide more data about if customers in Ireland complain with the sole reason of obtaining something free of charge from the restaurant or if they do not do it at all. Since in this research all the respondents gave the same answer, future research could be done to find out if this is a geographical or cultural factor.

The gender and age of the participants in the questionnaire was not a factor that influenced other responses because the questionnaire was applied only to the staff of a single restaurant. Results should therefore not be generalized. However, sample expansion could show additional findings.

For this dissertation, kitchen staff were not part of the research. However, future research may show whether complaints really result from kitchen work output or whether this is the perception of waiters and support staff. Future researchers are recommended to investigate whether the perception of restaurant staff is that customers complain to obtain something in compensation and, if so, to investigate the reasons and how the staff behave towards that. Another suggested in-depth investigation derived from this research would be to investigate the reasons some clients do not complain after having a bad experience.

It would also be interesting to conduct an observation-based experiment to be developed in a restaurant where, after a customer conflict arises, the staff tries to resolve the conflict using different strategies, such as apology, offering something free of charge or bill discounts to see how clients react to those recovery strategies and compare the effectiveness of each resolution.

Reflection

One of the most challenging parts of my research was to stay focused on my goals and objectives while looking for information. It was tempting to broaden over time the scope of research a little more. Sometimes I was going from one paper to another reading and researching when I was already in a subject that would not be fully relevant for my research. I often had to pause and ask myself whether that topic was essential information for my research. Identifying the resources and evaluating them to find academic information that will be related to my research was quite a challenge, as well as connecting all areas of the research without deviating from my objectives and while remaining objective.

Another important challenge was when the COVID-19 pandemic was declared and everything changed in a matter of days, including my research methodology. I had to adapt and make changes that in the end I consider were good decisions with good results. However, it took much more time than anticipated, using three strategies and a considerably large sample, analysing the information, ordering it and presenting it was definitely hard and time-consuming. For the time that was left, it was a very risky decision to adapt the strategy in the way I did, but it was worth it.

When I was presenting the data, although it was time-consuming, it did not present significant difficulties. However, when analysing the data, I had to educate myself in the use of Microsoft Excel, dynamic tables and mathematics in order to provide the reader with reliable and exact information. Comparing my work and my research with the literature and work of others was an interesting part of the process, since it was the part where all my work began to unify and make sense. I dedicated some time to reflect on my discussions to be sure I had not lost my way and purpose of this dissertation.

I consider that the COVID-19 pandemic had its disadvantages such as not being able to conduct the interviews face to face, or not being able to finish the experiment that I was originally conducting, in addition to having had extra information about the restaurant if it had not suddenly closed its doors. As always, however, in everything bad, there is always something good. Thanks to the pandemic it was easier for me to find people who would take the time to answer my survey and who would respond quickly and efficiently. The restaurant employees, finding themselves unemployed, were also available and took the time to answer the questionnaire in a timely manner. However, I would like to have had a little more time to expand the sample of the general population and restaurant employees in order to make a deeper analysis, even so, I consider that the research I have done could be valuable for future research based on this dissertation.

Throughout this process I have developed my reading and writing skills, logical thinking, especially when analysing data. And I have learned that if I need to work on something on a structural basis, whether it is learning to manage better my time or improve my organisation skills. However, with what I have learned throughout the development of this dissertation, I feel able to carry out new research in which I could continue developing my skills.

This dissertation has been an effective learning experience. It was full of challenges, which I overcame during the process. Writing this dissertation has not been easy, and writing it during a pandemic I think made it even more remarkable, it was quite a challenge to get inspiration while being in self-insolation added to the anxiety caused by the uncertainty of the well-being of my family. However, it was a transformative process for me, a self-discovery experience of how much I could persevere to accomplish something I consider worthwhile.

Bibliography

Crick, A. P. & Spencer, A., 2015. *New perspectives in Hospitality management*. UK: Emerald Group Publishing Limited,.

Cahn, D. D. & Abigail, R. A., 2014. *Managing Conflict through Communication*. Fifth edition ed. England: Pearson New International Edition.

Cahn, D. D. & Abigail, R. A., 2014. *Managing Conflict through Communication*. Fifth edition ed. England: Pearson New International Edition.

2020 Business Insight Ltd, n.d. *The Importance of Training and Development in the Workplace*. [Online]

Available at: <https://2020projectmanagement.com/resources/project-management-training-and-qualifications/the-importance-of-training-and-development-in-the-workplace>
[Accessed March 2020].

Allen, G. & Albala, K., 2007. *The business of food: encyclopedia of the food and drink industries*. s.l.:Greenwood Press.

American Express Customer Service Barometer, 2017. *Business Wire*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20171215005416/en/>
[Accessed April 2020].

At work, 2015. *Cross-sectional vs. longitudinal studies*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.iwh.on.ca/what-researchers-mean-by/cross-sectional-vs-longitudinal-studies>
[Accessed 1 May 2020].

Barlow, J. & Møller, C., 2008. *A complaint is a gift: Recovering customer loyalty when things go wrong*. second edition ed. San Francisco, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Bord Bia Irish Food Board, 2019. *Bord Bia Irish Food Board*. [Online]
Available at:
https://www.bordbia.ie/globalassets/bordbia2020/industry/news/2019_irish_foodservice_marketconsumer_insights_final.pdf
[Accessed April 2020].

Bord Bia, 2019. *Bord Bia*. [Online]
Available at:
https://www.bordbia.ie/globalassets/bordbia2020/industry/news/2019_irish_foodservice_marketconsumer_insights_final.pdf
[Accessed May 2020].

Drinks Industry Ireland, 2019. *Drinks Industry Ireland*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.drinksindustryireland.ie/out-of-home-food-beverage-spend-up-4-5/>
[Accessed April 2020].

Dutta, K., Venkatesh, . U. & Parsa, H., 2007. Service failure and recovery strategies in the restaurant sector: An Indo-US comparative study. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 17 07, pp. 351-363.

Egan, B., n.d. *The Pennsylvania State University*. [Online]
Available at: <https://psu.pb.unizin.org/hmd329/>
[Accessed April 2020].

Greasley, A., 2013. *Operations Management*. Third edition, ed. United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons UK.

Hospitality and Tourism Outlook, 2019. *AIB Business Banking*. [Online]
Available at: <https://business.aib.ie/content/dam/aib/business/docs/help-and-guidance/aib-hospitality-and-tourism-outlook-report-sept-2019.pdf>
[Accessed April 2020].

Irish Restaurant Awards, n.d. *Irish Restaurant Awards*. [Online]
Available at: <https://irishrestaurantawards.com/about/>
[Accessed April 2020].

Irish Restaurant Awards, n.d. *Irish Restaurant Awards*. [Online]
Available at: <https://irishrestaurantawards.com/best-customer-service-2/>
[Accessed April 2020].

Judkis, M., 2015. The fine art of complaining. *The Washington Post*, 13 01.

Jung-Eun Yoo, J., Terry Kim, T. & Lee, . G., 2012. Post-recovery customer relationships and customer partnerships in a restaurant setting. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, pp. 381-401.

Kayden, S., D. Anderson, . P. & Freit, R., 2015. *Emergency Department Leadership and Management: Best Principles and Practice*. United Kindom: Cambridge university press.

Kirti, D., Venkatesh, U. & Parsa, H., 2007. Service failure and recovery strategies in the restaurant sector: An Indo-US comparative study. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, pp. 351-363.

Kumar, R., 2011. *RESEARCH METHODOLOGY a step-by-step guide for beginners*. 3rd ed. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.

MICHELIN Guide UK Editorial Team, 2020. *MICHELIN Guide*. [Online]
Available at: <https://guide.michelin.com/ie/en/article/features/what-makes-great-service>
[Accessed 02 May 2020].

MOS, 2017. *4 Rules Of Verbatim Transcription And Its Importance In Qualitative Research*. [Online]
Available at: <http://www.legaltranscriptionservice.com/blog/2017/02/4-rules-of-verbatim-transcription-and-its-importance.html>
[Accessed 07 May 2020].

P. Crick, A. & Spencer, A., 2015. *New perspectives in Hospitality management*. UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Question Pro, n.d. *Question Pro*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.questionpro.com/article/survey-question-answer-type.html>
[Accessed 26 March 2020].

Restaurant & Hospitality Skillnet, n.d. *Restaurant & Hospitality Skillnet*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.rhskillnet.ie/about/>
[Accessed April 2020].

Restaurants Association of Ireland, n.d. *Restaurants Association of Ireland*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.rai.ie/key-issues/>
[Accessed April 2020].

Restaurants Association, 2017. *Senior Executive – Training*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.rai.ie/4556-2/>
[Accessed April 2020].

Saunders, M., Lewis, . P. & Thornhill , A., 2007. *Research Methods for Business Students*. Fourth Edition ed. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.

Solomon, M. R., 2018. *Consumer Behavior, Buying, having and being*. Twelfth edition, ed. England : Pearson Education limited.

Temkin, B., 2017. *Experience Matters*. [Online]
Available at: <https://experiencematters.blog/2017/02/23/customer-experience-leads-to-recommendations-charts-for-20-industries/>
[Accessed April 2020].

The Irish Times, 2020. *Coronavirus: People must stay at home, with limited exceptions, until Easter Sunday*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/health/coronavirus-people-must-stay-at-home-with-limited-exceptions-until-easter-sunday-1.4214241>
[Accessed 27 March 2020].

The worlds 50 best restaurants, n.d. *The worlds 50 best restaurants*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.theworlds50best.com/awards/art-of-hospitality-award>
[Accessed april 2020].

Tom E. Jones, E., 2019. *Training Industry*. [Online]
Available at: <https://trainingindustry.com/articles/performance-management/key-factors-that-influence-job-performance-the-performance-pathway-model/>
[Accessed March 2020].

Torres, E. N. & Kline, S., 2015. *New perspectives in Hospitality management*. UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.

TripAdvisor, 2019. *TripAdvisor*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.tripadvisor.com/ForRestaurants/r9109>
[Accessed April 2020].

Walker, 2020. *Walker*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.walkerinfo.com/knowledge-center/featured-research-reports/customers-2020-a-progress-report>
[Accessed April 2020].

Walker, J. R., 2017. *Introduction to hospitality*. seventh edition ed. Florida: Pearson.

Walker, n.d. *Walker*. [Online]
Available at: <https://www.walkerinfo.com/knowledge-center/featured-research-reports/customers-2020-a-progress-report>
[Accessed April 2020].

Welsh, K., 2008. *Happy About Customer Service?: Creating a Culture of Customer Service Excellence*. Silicon Valley, California: Happy About.

Appendix A: Interview questions

1. How long have you been a manager?
2. How many people have you managed?
3. How long have you worked in hospitality?
4. Do you see yourself working in the restaurant for years to come?
5. Is there an official process for dealing with and recording complaints?
6. How many complaints on average are you presented with from customers each shift / per day / per week?
7. What are the main complaints reported by customers?
8. What do you do when a customer reports an issue?
9. What are the steps that an employee should take after a customer has a complaint?
10. What actions do you have to take to solve a conflict presented by a customer?
11. Did you get any kind of training from the restaurant to solve disputes when they arise?
12. Do you think you have enough training to deal with customers' problems?
13. What do you think is the impact of bad feedback from a customer?
14. Do you consider it important to have a protocol which deals with customer complaints?
15. Would you adhere to a protocol if one was developed?
16. Would you like to add something additional that you consider important concerning customer service?

Appendix B: Questionnaire questions

1. Gender:

Female ()

Male ()

Prefer not to say ()

2. Age:

18-24 ()

25-29 ()

30-35 ()

36+ ()

3. How many years of experience working in hospitality do you have?

Less than 1 ()

1-2 ()

3-5 ()

6-8 ()

9+ ()

4. Is this job your only source of income?

Yes ()

No ()

5. Do you have any dependents?

Yes ()

No ()

6. Do you depend on this job as your main source of income?

Yes ()

I can live without this income but I prefer having it ()

No ()

7. Do you see yourself working in the restaurant for years to come?

Yes ()

Maybe ()

No ()

8. Do you have a true interest in improving your skills as a waiter or waitress?

Yes ()

No ()

9. When you have a problem with a customer what is the first thing you do?

(answer)

10. When a client complains do you report it with a manager?

Yes, always ()

Only if the customer requested it ()

Sometimes ()

No ()

11. Based on your experience, customer complaints are mainly related to:

Kitchen mistakes ()

Incorrect order taken by waiters ()

Problems related with service ()

Other ()

12. When a customer has a complaint:

I care so much and I try to do the best possible for the customer to be satisfied and compensated ()

I make an effort but it does not interest me much ()

I usually offer an apology but if it is not accepted I don't care ()

It doesn't matter to me, I just do my job ()

Other (answer)

13. Do you think you have enough training to deal with customers problems?

Yes ()

No ()

14. Did you get any kind of training from the restaurant to solve disputes when those have arisen?

Yes ()

No ()

15. Is there an official procedure in place to deal with complaints?

Yes ()

No ()

I do not know ()

16. Would you like to add something additional that you consider important concerning
customer service?

(comments)

Appendix C: Survey questions

1. Gender:

Female ()

Male ()

Prefer not to say ()

2. Age:

18-25 ()

26-35 ()

36-45 ()

46-55 ()

56+ ()

3. How often do you eat out in a restaurant?

Few times per week ()

Once per week ()

A couple of times per month ()

Once per month ()

Less than once per month ()

4. What are you more likely to eat out for?

Breakfast ()

Brunch ()

Lunch ()

Dinner ()

5. What is the most important aspect for you when in a restaurant:

Friendliness of the staff ()

Speed of service ()

Taste of food ()

Other (answer)

6. Have you ever recommended a restaurant only because they have an excellent service?

Yes ()

No ()

7. Will you go back to a restaurant with bad service only because the food is great?

Yes ()

Probably ()

No ()

8. You are more likely to return to the same restaurant due to:

Friendliness of the staff ()

Speed of service ()

Taste of food ()

Other (answer)

9. What was your last bad experience in a restaurant?

(answer)

I never had a bad experience eating in a restaurant ()

10. Did you bring the problem to the team's attention?

Yes ()

No ()

N/A ()

11. Did a member of the staff do something to compensate you for the bad experience?

Yes ()

No ()

N/A ()

12. Can you share more details of how they compensated it?

(answer)

N/A ()

13. Did they win you back?

Yes ()

No completely ()

No ()

N/A ()

14. When you have a bad experience in a restaurant when or where are you more likely to make a complaint?

At the time, with the manager or a member of the staff ()

On social media ()

Tell family and friends about my bad experience ()

Other (answer)

15. If you have made a complaint on social media, which have you used?

Restaurant's Facebook page ()

Restaurant's Instagram account ()

Yelp ()

TripAdvisor ()

Restaurant's online survey ()

Twitter ()

Other ()

N/A ()

16. When you have a bad experience in a restaurant how would you like it to be solved?

Dessert free of charge ()

Coffee free of charge ()

Bill discount ()

Discount on the next visit ()

An apology of a member of the staff is enough ()

Other ()

17. Being completely honest, have you ever complained in a restaurant just to see if you can get something free of charge?

Yes, once ()

Yes, just a couple of times ()

Yes, sometimes ()

Yes, always ()

No, never ()

Appendix D: Ethical considerations in the questionnaire

You are being asked to voluntarily take part in this research study. All the recovered data will be used to complete a dissertation on the subject of conflict in the restaurant sector as part of a Masters in Dispute Resolution at Independent College Dublin. Your answers will be taken with complete confidentiality and you will be entirely anonymous. No payment will be made to any participants. This questionnaire consists of 16 questions and will take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

For further information please contact us, we will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time.

Appendix E: Ethical considerations in the survey

You are being asked to voluntarily take part in this research study. All the recovered data will be used to complete a dissertation on the subject of conflict in the restaurant sector as part of a Masters in Dispute Resolution at Independent College Dublin. Your answers will be taken with complete confidentiality and you will be entirely anonymous. No payment will be made to any participants. This questionnaire consists of 17 questions and will take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

For further information please contact us, we will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time.

Appendix F: Information sheet for participants

PROJECT TITLE: Immediate Conflict Resolution in the Restaurant Sector

You are being asked to voluntarily take part in this research study. All the recovered data will be used to complete a dissertation on the subject of conflict in the restaurant sector as part of a Masters in Dispute Resolution at Independent College Dublin. No payment will be made to any participants. The interview will consist of 16 questions and will take no longer than 30 minutes to complete.

The data I collect does not contain any personal information about you and your answers will be taken with complete confidentiality and you will be entirely anonymous

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without an explanation required from you. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn/destroyed. You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you. You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered (unless answering these questions would interfere with the study's outcome. A full de-briefing will be given after the study).

If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

For further information please contact us, we will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time.

Appendix G: Interview transcripts: Assistant Manager

Date: 23.04.2020

Location: N.A

Interview Setting: Video call and recorded with the audio recorder tool on a mobile phone.

Interviewer: Janeth Alvarado (JA)

Interviewee: Assistant manager (FV)

- 1 JA: How long have you been a manager?
- 2 FV: So, I been an assistant manager for I think around 3 years and a supervisor before that around 1
- 3 or 1 and a half.
- 4 JA: Ahh ok.
- 5 FV: So, in totals probably almost 5 years.
- 6 JA: 5 years, so before, before Milanos then?
- 7 FV: So, before Milano I was, I was working in a different area, so I was working in...
- 8 JA: Ok.
- 9 FV: A, in a lab so it was a different, different area...
- 10 JA: Ah ok.
- 11 FV: And I was not working in a manager position or anything like that so.
- 12 JA: Ah ok, so five years as a manager. And how many people do you think that you have you
- 13 managed?

14 FV: In total?

15 JA: Aha.

16 FV: Ah, that's difficult. So well at the moment in Milano is let's say Haddington road right now it's
17 probably on 30 people and then before that was temple bar which was probably around 15 and then
18 before that was Grand Canal which has probably as well 15 so I'll say maybe at that given point
19 maybe 80 people.

20 JA: Ok.

21 FV: But if I count all the people that come and go its...

22 JA: Yeah.

23 FV: Gonna be probably like two hundred or more for sure...

24 JA: A lot.

25 FV: Because is a lot of people coming and going all the time so...

26 JA: Yeah, ah ok.

27 FV: See a lot of people.

28 JA: But like at the same time like 30 more or less.

29 FV: At the same time yeah, I'll say 30 at the moment in the last two years and then 50 in the other
30 years, yeah.

31 JA: That's quite a lot.

32 FV: Yes.

33 JA: Ok and how long have you been working in hospitality? Like, did you work in something similar
34 before Milanos?

35 FV: Ah, so in, when I, so here in Milano I been in a six or seven, six I think and then before that was
36 not hospitality but I, I worked 3 summers in a cinema in Portugal and but it was when I was younger
37 so was probably like 8, no, more like maybe 11 or 12 years ago.

38 JA: Ah ok.

39 FV: I worked 3 summers in a, in a cinema so but it was, was not manager was just, you know, behind
40 the counter.

41 JA: Yeah.

42 FV: So that was the only hospitality thing I had before, yeah.

43 JA: Ok... super.

44 JA: And do you see yourself working in Milano for years to come?

45 FV: Hmm, I don't know is difficult because if you'd ask me 10 years ago if I saw that I was kind of
46 be working as a manager in a restaurant I would say oh there is no way because you know for different
47 well, reasons you know .

48 JA: Huh.

49 FV: So, I don't know what is gonna happen in the future, but I think just because of the schedule I
50 would probably like to find something else in the future, but you know I'm happy in Milanos so but...

51 JA: Ah ok.

52 FV: I wouldn't say no if I could find something maybe 9 to 5 job or something I would probably swap
53 yeah. This I'm sure because if I don't, I'll be 60 years old and leave you know work like at 1 am.

54 JA: Yeah, true.

55 FV: But so, yeah.

56 JA: Perfect, ok.

57 JA: Is there hmm, do you know if is there is a, an official process? Like, to deal and record complaints.
58 You know if you have something like a book that you are writing down every day like the complaints
59 or something.

60 FV: Eh well we have, so we have the managers' diary which we, is good practice to put stuff that
61 happens in general no just complains but yeah so if have been a complaint or something we should
62 put in the managers' diary because then the others managers will know as well and if the customer
63 comes back or if something with staff is a good way to make sure that all the managers are aware at
64 what's happening.

65 JA: Ok.

66 FV: I don't think there is an official think unless is really, really serious so let's say the customer, if a
67 customer gets violent or if ehh staff gets violent or aggressive or something there is probably
68 something online from the company that we can submit and forward to people who are probably more
69 capable of doing with a serious situation. But I think as a general thing I don't think there is anything...

70 JA: Ok.

71 FV: No.

72 JA: Ok.

73 JA: Amm hmm so, how many hmm complains hmm hmm my voice ah, do you have? like in average,
74 like do you think hmm hmm do have like dairy, mi voice. (Giggles)

75 FV: Ahh in average?

76 JA: Is not coronavirus, I swear.

77 (Giggles)

78 FV: How many complaints in average of say per week or.

79 JA: Yeah, like you have, like you see like for example per day or per week or if you realised that
80 there is one day, like per day or.

81 FV: Ok so that's depends, so if that is staff complains it's, I'd say is every day there, there's a
82 complaint about something or abouts service or about not having enough people or about someone
83 else or something. If its customer I would say probably on average maybe once a day I'd say, I think
84 is fair.

85 JA: Ok.

86 FV: Probably more actually you know but I'm thinking about like serious complaints...

87 JA: Ok.

88 FV: Like when they actually ask to talk with the manager or they get upset or something probably
89 once, either once a day or once every other day...

90 JA: Ok.

91 FV: But if its staff is definitely more than once per day.

92 JA: Oh yeah (giggle) ok.

93 FV: Just depends on the...

94 JA: But from customers, you realized that at least is once, one...

95 FV: I'll say so yeah.

96 JA: One per day.

97 FV: I think so.

98 JA: Ok.

99 JA: And what, what do you think that are the main complains reporter by customers?

100 FV: Ummm, it tends to be the speed of service or...

101 JA: Ok.

102 FV: Hmm. Poor quality of food, so let say they need to go somewhere or something and the, the food
103 is not coming fast enough or they see that other people are getting the food before hmm hmm, and
104 then there is the other part where it could be just because now the pizza is not cold, is not hot enough
105 or sometimes that so I think is those two is just speed or the quality.

106 JA: Ok, quality food or speed.

107 JA: Ok, and what do you do when a customer reports an issue? like when the waiter goes with you
108 and say like the customer wanna talk with you, what is the first thing that you do?

109 FV: So hmm always go to the to the table and first always ask the person what's, I always say well
110 your waiter just came to me and, and said there was an issue, would you like to tell me what happens
111 so then the person will usually tell me what happened and sometimes they are bit, I can tell they are
112 upset sometimes they are ok with it so depending on the approach as well...

113 JA: Aha. (coughing)

114 FV: I try to adapt as well a little bit, so if they're upset I usually don't really talk much because I rather
115 just let them talk and then at in the end I just say well will you be happy if I do this or do that that
116 make it better then the person usually says yes, if they, I can tell they are not upset I usually actually
117 try to talk to them a little bit and try not justify what happened but maybe let them explain a little bit
118 maybe why the food was latte or why something cannot be done or so it, it depends a little bit but
119 yeah usually I just I normally try not to talk too much because I know that that's not what people
120 really want to, you know, to hear they just want get the issue fix and that's it.

121 JA: Hmm. ok, ok.

122 JA: And do you know what are the steps that an employee should take a after a customer complain?

123 FV: Hmm. Yes. I, there's again is not really an official thing there is guidelines what they, what the
124 company wants the managers to do is to not to again, no to engage too much with the customer so
125 not try to confront the customer or make excuses, that, what the company always says is you just go
126 to the table and then you just fix the problem and that's it so you don't really, we not really supposed
127 to make excuses or you know is just apologise what can I do for you...

128 JA: Aha.

129 FV: And fix it and that's it.

130 JA: Ah ok.

131 FV: So that's the, that's the guideline.

132 JA: Aha. Like the customer is always right.

133 FV: Yes.

134 JA: ok.

135 FV: Even, even if the customer, there is a thing where I don't really agree which is even...

136 JA: Aha.

137 FV: If he, even if the customer is been aggressive and defensive and if he gets screaming and
138 something, we are not supposed to say anything as well, so we are just supposed to take it and ignore
139 it, ignore the...

140 JA: Aha.

141 FV: Abuse and just try, you know, fix the problem and that's it. Which I don't really agree I don't
142 think anyone should, you know, disrespected doesn't matter if you are a manager or whatever I don't
143 think that's fair, but that's what the company actually wants...

144 JA: Ok.

145 FV: We actually have a guideline that says that if a customer is been abusive you are not supposed to
146 fight it you are supposed to just take it and that's it so.

147 JA: Ok, yeah.

148 (laughs)

149 FV: Well...

150 JA: Ok, ok.

151 JA: And what action do you have to take to solve a conflict, so, are the same that you said already
152 then, like...

153 FV: Hmm. Yeah.

154 JA: Aha.

155 FV: So basically, not engage too much...

156 JA: Aha.

157 FV: And just ask them to explain why they are no happy and then do you best to fix it and that's it.

158 JA: Ok, perfect.

159 JA: Did you get any training from the restaurant to solve the disputes that arise?

160 FV: Hmm. No, so it's pretty much the only training we have as a manager, in general, is when you
161 start, when you become a manager you shadow other managers were already working there, so...

162 JA: Ok.

163 FV: You basically learning from watching other people work, so, it kind of depends a little bit I guess
164 who you work with, and but there is no, there is no proper guideline to, I mean the company has the
165 training plan and the training plan has a lot of stuff but it's mostly system staff you know...

166 JA: Aha.

167 FV: So is like how to do this or how to do that like in the system or how to take payments, how to,
168 not take payments, how to process the payments on the computer so stuff like that.

169 JA: Oh, ok.

170 FV: Operation stuff, but there is not really training per say, on the how to deal with, with customers
171 or any like that, that's, I think they think is more kind of a common sense thing.

172 JA: Oh ok, perfect, ok.

173 JA: And do you think that you have enough training like now like enough experience to deal with,
174 with complaints?

175 FV: Personally?

176 JA: Aha.

177 FV: Yeah.

178 JA: Ok.

179 JA: What do you think, that, is the impact that a bad feedback from a customer has?

180 FV: Ah, hmm, well, it's, it can be, it depends, I, I think the common saying and the common theory
181 is that's, it's, it's two actually when someone is happy, it, it doesn't have the same weight as when
182 someone is unhappy so let's say people can go 10 times to a restaurant or to a any customer service
183 place, hmm, store or whatever and they can have 10, they can go 10 times and be very happy but if
184 one of them is not, they're not happy there would make it more impactful than the other times, you

185 know. So it can be impactful obviously because if someone goes to a restaurant and then they really
186 don't like it, especially if it's the first time they go there, the chances are they not gonna go there again
187 at all, or not only that but can actually go to their friends or their family and say well don't go there
188 because, they may don't even say don't go there but they may say all this happened to me there can
189 you believe it or blah, blah, blah and that's enough for maybe another 7 or 8 people not going there
190 as well, so...

191 JA: Aha.

192 FV: Yeah, it can be impactful f course.

193 JA: Ok, ok.

194 JA: So, do you consider important to have a protocol which deals with customers complains? Like
195 official protocol.

196 FV: Hmm, yes, I think so, I mean is, is important.

197 JA: Ok

198 JA: And, would you adhere a protocol if one is developed?

199 FV: Would I what?

200 JA: Adhere...

201 FV: Sorry.

202 JA: Like to follow the ...

203 FV: Yes.

204 JA: Protocol...

205 FV: Yeah.

206 JA: If one... Perfect.

207 JA: And, so, that's it, would you like to add something like additional that you consider like important
208 for customer service or to deal with the problem?

209 FV: No I think that, I think we covered everything, hmm. I think, I think that's it. I, the only thing I
210 would say that I just think that in Milano specific but maybe it happens in others companies as well,
211 I don't, I think they should just, have eh different, respecting on, if people are getting abuse by the
212 customers, not just managers but staff as well, you know, because the I, for, I know for fact that the
213 company doesn't wants us to engage or to fight back but I, I think that's, that's, that's a bit silly because
214 you know if someone is shouting and calling names to a waiter or to a...

215 JA: Aha.

216 FV: Manager I think we should have the right to you know just kind of either tell people to leave the
217 restaurant or something, but we are not allowed to do that...

218 JA: Ok.

219 FV: According to the protocols that, there, there, there are just for that, that part so.

220 JA: Yeah, that, that's different because I think that then in other places is like you can ask the customer
221 to leave the restaurant.

222 FV: To leave, yeah.

223 JA: Yeah.

224 FV: Yeah.

225 JA: Or to call...

226 FV: That's the only think.

227 JA: Yeah.

228 FV: But the rest, I think.

229 JA: Ok. perfect. Ok. I'm gonna stop this, wait.

Appendix H: Interview transcript General Manager

Date: 24.04.2020

Location: N.A

Interview Setting: Video call and recorded with the audio recorder tool on a mobile phone.

Interviewer: Janeth Alvarado (JA)

Interviewee: General manager (AA)

The call was interrupted twice due to application failures.

- 1 JA: So, How long have you been a manager?
- 2 AA: Hmm. Since May 2017, so 2 years, 3 years.
- 3 JA: OK.
- 4 JA: And, how many people have you managed?
- 5 AA: In total?
- 6 JA: Huh.
- 7 AA: The most were 40.
- 8 JA: Ok.
- 9 JA: And, how long have you been working in hospitality?
- 10 AA: Since April 2014, so that is 6 years.
- 11 JA: Ok.

12 JA: Do you see yourself working in the restaurant for years to come?

13 AA: No

14 JA: Ok.

15 JA: Is there an official process for dealing with and recording complaints?

16 AA: Ah, from customers?

17 JA: Huh. From customers.

18 AA: There are.

19 JA: Can you tell me more about that?

20 AA: Well they can ah make a complaint in the restaurant and then the manager on duty will deal with

21 it, which is quite an unofficial in, in that case, but then, they have the option to go to customer services

22 from pizza express, they would call or email there and the representative would go back to them after

23 investigating whatever happened. If there is needed an investigation...

24 JA: Huh.

25 AA: Then ah, they'll back to them with a resolution, which sometimes it means something free or

26 you know, or nothing.

27 JA: Ok. But you have then, like something that you record every issue that they, they have?

28 AA: They do, we don't, we don't record in the restaurant.

29 JA: Ok.

30 AA: Unless is something that is a food incident or some sort of incident that affect to get, you know,

31 but just because they waited a long time for food that, that won't be something that will be recorded

32 JA: Ok. So just something bigger.

33 AA: Yes. So whenever you have something in the food (coughing), or if someone got sick or anything
34 like that we do have an application... (audio is lost)

35 JA: So. How many complaints on average are you presented with from the customers each shift or
36 per day or per week?

37 AA: Not really an average, some time is, we don't have any if the shift runs smoothly and the
38 customers are please, sometimes it can go really... (audio is lost)

39 AA: A certain number of complaints that we receive a day it can be none or it can be 10 that depends
40 very much on the customers or the team.

41 JA: Ok.

42 JA: So, what are the main complaints reported by customers?

43 AA: Hmm. From the service that we have, the main one will be attentiveness of the team and the long
44 wait main the slow service.

45 JA: Ok. And. What do you do when a customer reports an issue?

46 AA: If the waiter can deal with them, I don't do anything, you know, but I usually ask the waiter is
47 there something that you need me for or can handle it, you know because certain issues don't really
48 need the manager to be there, and also that gives a little bit of confidence to the staff and, and it is
49 important because a lot of people need to know how to deal with customers if they want to move on
50 you know? To do something more right? But that confidence kind of comes with time, so if they said
51 no, is better if you talk to them then I will go to speak to the table and ask them, my college told me
52 that there was a problem, that there was an issue hmm. I'm not really sure, will you tell me what
53 happened, you know, because there are sides from each story. There are stories from each side I meant
54 to (giggles) so, the waiter can tell me, look they received the cold food and now they are, now they
55 are complaining so, I would go and find out what is going on, they tell me in their words whats is

56 going on. An example, we waited 45 minutes for the food. Ok, I have to apologize first that they're
57 not having the best experience and to find out how I can to help them you know to overcome that
58 because eventually and I tell them look, if it is our fault right? Usually, you know we won't even go
59 into that, how, whose fault is it, what happened, no, people come in to have a good time right, so you
60 just going to look I'm really sorry about that, I'll talk to kitchen, I'll find out what happened, really
61 make sure that you know would try to make sure that this doesn't happen again and in the mind time
62 what can I do for you? You know, I would if they still waiting for the food I would go and check on
63 the food and make sure that it comes fast but if the food came wrong now I'll ask them if there is
64 anything that we can do for you, you know like anything at all, other food or some people don't want
65 other food so just give them drinks or discounts on the bill or anything like that. But eventually, it
66 kind of goes from the guest you know? What is that they want, make sense?

67 JA: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, it makes sense. Ok.

68 JA: And, what are the steps that an employee should take after a customer has a complaint?

69 AA: First, they are going to see what they can do for the guest you know? But then that depends as I
70 said before if that is something that the employee can handle, you know? Like they are waiting for
71 food long or something like that I pretty sure that anyone can handle it if there is a foreign object in
72 the food then straight away they have to tell the manager right. So if there is a serious issue then the
73 manager has to be involved, but if is not, they have to talk to the guest ok. What happen we really
74 sorry that you didn't have a good experience, let me see what I can actually do for you at this time.
75 Because I want you to have a good experience I want you to come back to us please forgive us, I'm
76 on one of those days when everything goes wrong.

77 JA: Ok.

78 JA: Ok. So that is from an employee and from you? Like what actions do you take, do you have to
79 take to solve a conflict presented by a customer?

80 AA: If I need to go to them, if no I would do absolutely the same thing as the waiter did, you know?
81 Like what is that, than I can do for you, if is a serious complaint I will have to look it in this application
82 that contacts the QS that's something wrong, that something has gone wrong.

83 JA: Ok.

84 JA: And, did you get any kind of training from the restaurant to solve disputes when they arise?

85 AA: No

86 JA: Ok.

87 JA: Do you think you have enough training to deal with customers' problems?

88 AA: Ok, ah, training to deal with problems doesn't really happen. Whenever you work with people,
89 you learn how to deal with people you know, problems don't just come because hmm, something
90 wrong happens, problems come from people having a bad day, from children been too noisy, from
91 been dumped or not getting a job that you wanted, you know. So I can't really say, yes there are steps
92 when we get to really bad thing that happens in the restaurant, right? (vibrating phone) So, we are
93 trained to deal with thing that happens that affects a person fiscally, right? So, if there was something
94 in the food, if they got sick, there are steps to do to deal with these things but other than that you can't
95 really be trained to be kind, and you can't really be trained to have hmm. To have people skills, if
96 you know what I mean...

97 JA: Yeah.

98 AA: You have people that can do it because they like people (vibrating phone) and people that can't
99 because they can't, they just don't have any type of empathy. But there is not real training that you
100 can have, there are steps, what happens? You apologize, you know, you find out what happened, you
101 try to fix the issue if you can you fix the issue and you ask them to come back with something if they
102 need something. You know, but other than that there isn't really much you can do, you can solve an

103 issue just by patting a person on the back or you can, you can solve an issue by given then 50%
104 discount on the bill.

105 JA: Ok, perfect.

106 JA: Hmm, and what do you think is the impact of a, of a bad feedback from a customer?

107 AA: If is in writing, if is in writing on a social media that would definitely impact the way people see
108 the company, you know the brand, has a bad impact on the brand and if is just in the restaurant it will
109 have an impact on sales, on money and a bad impact a negative impact on the morale of the team
110 (noises) now we lose money, we may lose that customer, we may lose the recommendations that that
111 customer makes.

112 JA: Ok. Perfect.

113 JA: And, do you consider it important like to have a protocol which deals with customer complaints?

114 AA: Yes, it's very important to have a protocol but again you can't be a robot, you know? So, you
115 need to make sure that that protocol is been follow based on every single complaint that you get, you
116 know? So, yes we do have steps, go to the guest, find out what happened, apologize, well you
117 apologize first then you find out what happened, empathize, try to feel whatever they feel and try to
118 find out what is that, that you can actually do for them. But the real do for them, not just ok I'm gonna
119 take the food out you know? Maybe they want something else, maybe they just want to be listen to,
120 people need that you know? So the protocol doesn't really tell you step by step what you need to do,
121 you need to make sure to find out what you need to do base on the face to face interaction with the
122 guest. Or the full whole interaction with the guest.

123 JA: Ok.

124 JA: And, would you adhere to a protocol if one was developed?

125 AA: Oh yeah, absolutely, like again we do have steps, hmm, but you know? Again, you can't become
126 a robot.

127 JA: Yeah, ok. And, so that's it, I don't know if you would like to add something else, something
128 additional that you consider important concerning to customer service.

129 AA: I consider important the fact that people are people just like you and me and a lot of time we
130 forget that so whoever works in customers service whether if there is a phone chat or face to face
131 people need to be treated like we want to be treated whenever we have an issue, with protocol or not
132 and with steps or not we need to make sure that we listen and that we have an open heart whenever
133 anyone says anything, no matter how hard they say it or how badly they make us feel...

134 JA: Aha.

135 AA: They do that because they feel bad inside so listening is the first step to absolutely any type of
136 complaint.

137 JA: Ok, perfect. Ok, I'm gonna stop this, just a second.

Appendix I: Questionnaire open questions responses

When you have a problem with a customer what is the first thing you do?

1. Try to think of the best solutions for the issue
2. Getting to the core of the problem, e.g if a customer complains that there is not enough chicken in their salad I need to find out if there wasn't enough chicken relative to restaurant's usual standards or if the customers expectations exceeded the restaurants standard practices.
3. Listen
4. Call the manager
5. Be nice to them
6. If I can resolve the problem then I'll do so. Otherwise I'll go to an assistant manager or manager
7. Keep calm and see can I sort the problem as quickly as possible
8. Try to see if the problem is easily solvable on my own before going to a manager
9. Trying to find the best solution for customer !!
10. Asking help from the manager
11. Apologize
12. I apologize and try to find a way to solve the problem without major consequences.
13. I apologise

Would you like to add something additional that you consider important concerning customer service?

1. Always smile :)
2. Usually I just do what feels right in the current situation. If I can sense that a customer is generally just argumentative then I won't go to great lengths to try and rectify issues. Otherwise I will do all I can to help them
3. We must treat customers like we like to be treated. In our restaurant are waiters however in street are customers.
4. When you are a new waiter you are totally lost for the first months concerning customer service
5. I did get training for dealing with customers problems but I got the training a while after I was already a waiter, not when I was starting to be a waiter.
6. If you don't care don't even bother to come to work

Appendix J: Survey open questions responses

What was your last bad experience in a restaurant?

1. Slow service in a high end restraint. Very long wait between courses.
2. I was under charged (about 50% when there was already a 50% promotion) and when I volunteered the fact they took far too long to sort it out.
3. Food was tasteless and bland. Rice wasn't cooked properly
4. Requested Gluten Free Bread and they brought bread with gluten.
5. Feeling unwell after food and the way the service was dealt with unprofessional response
6. Waited for long time for one starter when family had mains
7. Order incorrect
8. Bad service and bad food
9. Mix up of food and poor service
10. Waiting 30 minutes for our second coffee to arrive, we asked three times and were ignored
11. Cold food.
12. Poor quality food
13. Can't think of one
14. Small siting area in Wagamama
15. Dinner was overcooked
16. Noisey children
17. Bourned chicken nuggets for kids?
18. Bad cooking
19. 2012
20. Slow service food took over an hour from ordering

21. Very slow service
22. A waiter ignoring me and kept serving others before me
23. Belated service
24. The waiter butted in on our conversation
25. Not very tasty food
26. Rude staff
27. Rude waitress
28. Poor customer service skills
29. Having to ask 3 different staff members for the same thing and never got it , then had to ask twice for the bill and never got it so had to just go wait at a till to pay
30. Rude waiter
31. Went to a pizza place where the staff were rude and impatient
32. Slow service
33. Waiting too long to be served
34. The waitress was hurry us up to leave the table
35. Rude staff not helpful
36. Havnt had one for a long time
37. Wrong order and waiting too long
38. No
39. Just a rude waiter that's all
40. Bunsen
41. Chinese restaurant in Tallaght.
42. I had seafood in restaurant a few months ago, it was completely tasteless, no seasoning and presentation was bad
43. Forest avenue

44. Forgetting orders , delayed
45. Port quality of food
46. Bad layout and food not up to standard
47. A steak. Too tough
48. Bad food.
49. Music too loud, heater blasting into my face and items on menu unavailable
50. Told 10 minutes for table. Left 2 hours waiting on call
51. very slow service
52. None
53. Food was average .not what was recommended to me by a friend
54. Impersonal, slow food, I think they forgot about us.
55. I went to a restaurant with a group of 6 of us. We were left waiting about 10 mins before we were given the menus. Probably another 10 mins before our order was taken. When the waiter took our order he didn't write down the order. My friend asked if he needed to write it as we were all going to have starters and mains. He said he would remember it. He had a bit of a arrogant attitude. We had to wait a further 20 mins before we received our starters. When it came to our main course the order was wrong. 2 of the mains were wrong and a steak that was ordered rare came out well done. This happened because the waiter didn't write down the order and thought he could remember it. We then had desserts and coffee. From the moment we arrived in to the restaurant to the time we got our desserts I think we were there for 1 and a half hours.
56. Food not of good quality and not freshly cooked
57. Left waiting ages, waitress forgetting to come back to us several times.
58. Burger and chips

59. When the waiter kept coming over to the table asking us were we ok for everything,even when we were in a conversation
60. 1 hour wait for mains without being recognised by staff
61. Below average food
62. Waiting 1 hour for food
63. 8 months
64. Very slow service
65. Ignorant staff
66. Staff ignorance
67. Reheated food because it took so long
68. I was told 10 minutes after I ordered something it would take a further 30 minutes and wasnt able to asking for something else.
69. Sorry, I don't remember
70. Food which I ordered looked beautiful on the plate but wasn't tasty at all.
71. Bad food
72. I went for dinner with 2 friends, 1 dish was forgotten and for another one the wrong dish was brought out so we had to send it back and wait for a new one to be cooked, while we were waiting for that one the other people had already finished eating, it was also hard to get the waiters attention when we needed them or had a problem even though the restaurant wad quiet
73. unprofesional staff
74. didn't accept error made by them while ordering and blamed us and didn't hide it
75. Rude waiter
76. Very bad staff, rude and having the staff break because the restaurant was not too busy
77. Missing items we ordered

78. Lala's in Huddersfield. Lovely venue but the waiter brought out a large family naan and it brushed against someone's coat as he came through.

79. Last year

80. Staff not returning to see if you needed anything else

81. Bad experience in a restaurant we had wanted to go to for a long time, it was a special occasion for us. They didn't have the wine we chose from the list, they offered an alternative but then after we had opened the alternative bottle it was discovered they had our original choice all along they just didn't go and look for it properly. They pretended they still didn't have it even though we saw the waitress bring the original bottle down. We would have liked the opportunity to switch. The food also did not live up to the hype, we were having a tasting menu and a huge amount of the dishes had a same same kind of flavour. Like as if the kitchen were trying to use up the same sauce on each dish.